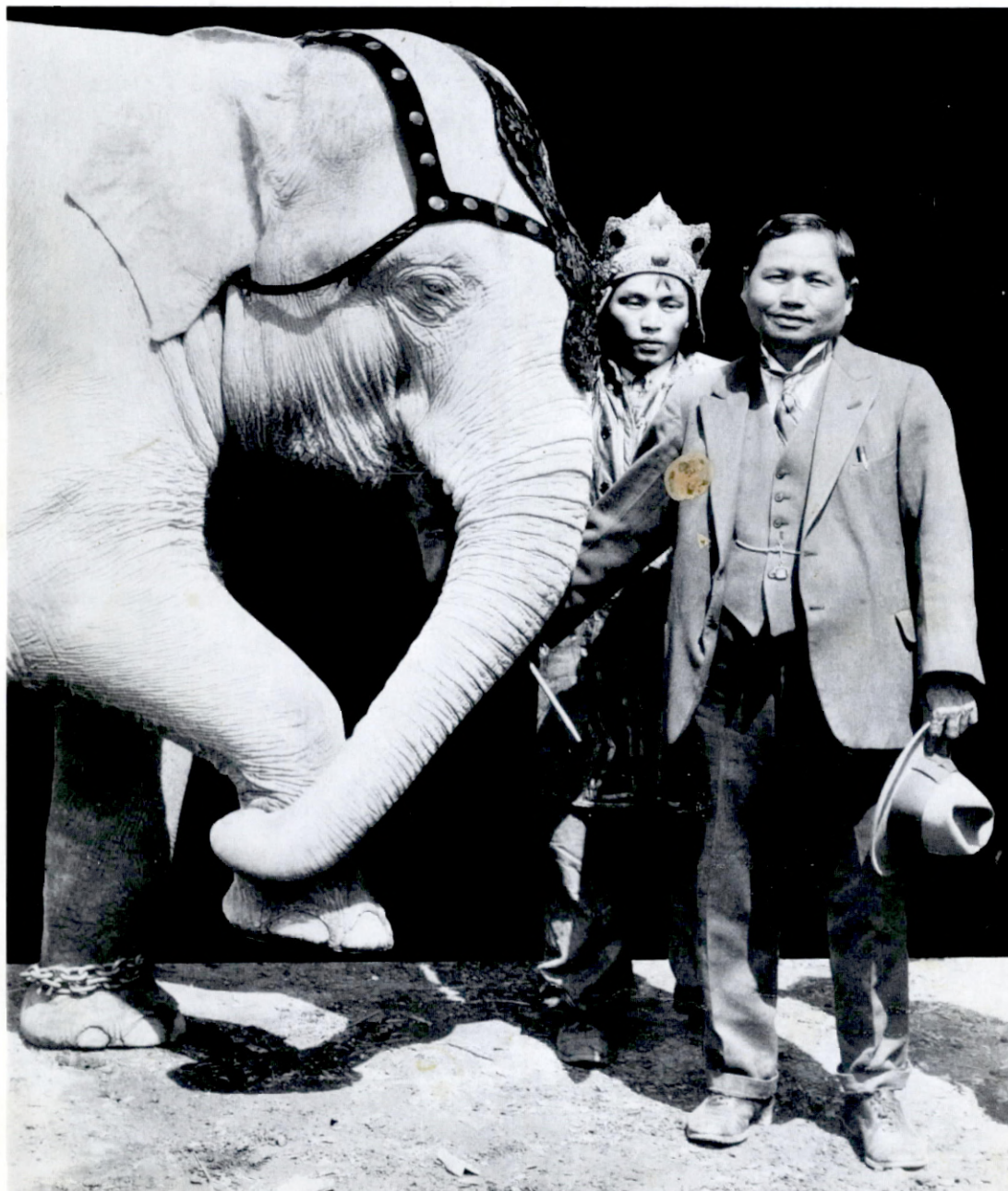


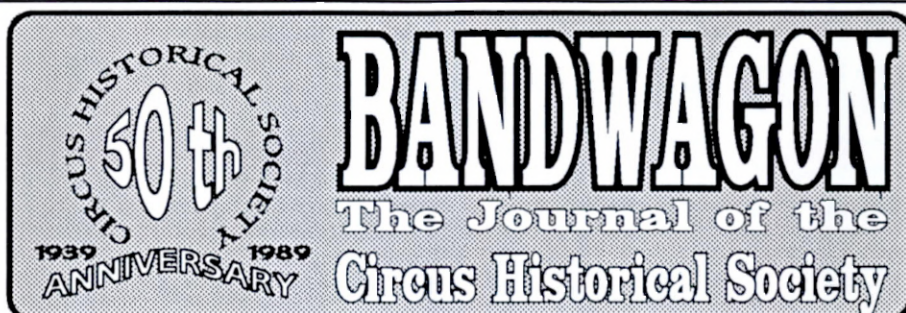
**FAMOUS ROBBINS CIRCUS 1936**

# **BANDWAGON**

**The Journal of the Circus Historical Society**

**March-April 1989**





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# FRED D. PFENING, JR., EDITOR

Fred D. Pfening III, Managing Editor-Joseph T. Bradbury, Associate Editor  
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## THIS MONTH'S COVER

In 1927 the Ringling-Barnum Circus presented a most unusual animal, Pawah, the sacred white elephant of Burma. The elephant was owned and presented by Dr. Saw D. Pow Min. He had captured the elephant as a baby in November 1919.

The animal was with the show only in 1927. The elephant was exhibited in the menagerie and was a sensation. Photo from the Van Matre collection.

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## THE PRESIDENT COMMENTS

Secretary-Treasurer Johann Dahlinger will be sending out the dues notices soon. Members will have the opportunity to show their support of the Circus Historical Society by becoming Sustaining, Contributing, and Concessionaires Club members by paying \$25, \$50 or \$100, rather than the standard rate of \$17. Members who pay these amounts will receive a special certificate of appreciation as well as the knowledge that they have done a good deed.

Last year almost 200 members honored themselves and their organization by joining in one of the three special categories which brought in almost \$3000 in extra revenue. The result was a record breaking year for the *Bandwagon* which published almost a hundred more pages of circus history than it did just two years ago with more color illustrations than ever. It also allowed the CHS to refrain from a dues increase and left a surplus in the treasury.

We had a spectacular year in 1988. With your help we can continue to make the CHS and the *Bandwagon* bigger and better in 1989.

## CONVENTION UPDATE

Planning continues at a breakneck pace for the big Circus Historical Society Golden Anniversary convention to be held in Columbus, Ohio from July 27 through July 30. The Holiday Inn at Ohio Center has been chosen as our convention hotel. A fine, full service hotel with a swimming pool and fitness center, it is located directly across the street from the Ohio Center where Circus Vargas, our host show, will be appearing. The hotel rates will be \$52 for a single and \$55 for a double which is an extremely favorable rate for a good hotel in a major urban area. A hotel and convention registration card will be included in the May-June *Bandwagon*. The CHS registration fee has not been set at this time; however, it should be in the \$40-\$45 range and will cover all events including the Circus Vargas performance and the banquet. A special rate for those wishing to attend only the banquet will also be available.

Cifford E. Vargas, founder and president of Circus Vargas, will be the banquet speaker and our top billed attraction. Another feature will be a unprecedented showing of treasures from the Pfening Archives including dozens of Ringling Bros. posters printed by Buffalo's Courier Company in the 1890s, other examples of lithographers' art from the 19th century, rare letters, and historic

contracts. Stuart Thayer, the country's premier circus historian, will give an important address on the history of early menageries. By popular demand William Woodcock, the late 20th century's answer to Stewart Craven, will conduct a session on elephants. The ever-popular circus film festival, the annual circusiana auction to benefit the organization, and talks by Vargas personnel will be among the other highlights. We have received recent word that John Polacsek will present a paper on the Buffalo Bill Wild West and that Eva Amidon will discuss Father Ed Sullivan, beloved former chaplain of the CFA.

Never before have we had such a varied and interesting program--and this is just what we have locked in so far. Plans

are in the works for other exciting events which will be covered in more detail in the May-June issue.

Activities will officially begin on Thursday afternoon, July 27. An earlybird special on Wednesday night will be rare circus films in the bull room. Ample time will be provided to jackpot or visit one of Columbus' many tourist attractions. This is one meeting you won't want to miss. Come to Columbus to help the CHS celebrate 50 years of recording circus history.

There is still room on the program for those wishing to make a historical presentation. If you plan to do so please contact Fred D. Pfening III, 2315 Haverford Rd., Columbus, Ohio 43220 as soon as possible.



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# FAMOUS ROBBINS CIRCUS

Season of 1936, and other

## JAMES HERON SHOWS OF THE 1930s

By Joseph T. Bradbury

*Foreword: Although the principal subject of this article is the 1936 season of the Famous Robbins Circus mention will be made of other shows owned by James Heron during the 1930s. Heron has been described as a rather quiet, very private individual and during the years his shows were on the road a minimum of information appeared in the Billboard. During the 1931-33 period the magazine ran weekly "Short biographies of well known circus personalities." Virtually all of Heron's contemporaries were covered; however, he was not. When he died in the early 1960s Heron requested no obituary be published nationally. As a result it is difficult to research the Heron shows through normal channels. We are extremely fortunate to have the information provided by Roger Boyd. Boyd knew Heron well, having joined the Downie Bros. Circus in 1929 at age 13. Heron was manager of this show. Boyd stayed with Heron for eight consecutive seasons and remained close to him until his death. Heron gave Boyd a vast amount of historical data on his shows, including contracts and bills of sale. We are appreciative of this material being made available by Roger Boyd for this article.*

James (Jimmy) Heron was born in the early 1890s, presumably in the Worcester, Massachusetts area as that was his life-time home. Roger Boyd advises Heron was in his late 30s when he first met him in 1929.

Heron's first experience in show business was working with or operating small animal exhibits. He worked for John T. Benson, a noted animal importer in Hudson, New Hampshire for a number of years, most of it during the off season in the winter.

In the late teens Heron became associated with Andrew Downie, and was press agent in 1917 on Downie's medium size rail show LaTena Circus. There is no record of him in 1918 and he may have been in military service during the first world war. In 1919 Heron returned as treasurer to Downie's railer, then titled Walter L. Main Circus. For six consecutive seasons he served as treasurer for Downie. In 1922 Heron was the owner of the number two freak animal show on Main. In 1923 and 1924 he owned the Jungleland show on the Main midway.

The 1924 season was the last that Downie operated the Walter L. Main Circus. The fol-



James Heron, on right, and Charles Donahue on Famous Robbins Circus in 1935. Roger Boyd photo in Elbirn collection.

lowing year he sold the physical equipment to the Miller brothers of Marland, Oklahoma who organized the so called "second" 101 Ranch Wild West to tour in 1925. James Heron went with the 1925 Ranch show as treasurer, sent specifically to look out for Downie's interest and see that payments were made on schedule.

Andrew Downie returned to the road in 1926 with a new motorized show called Downie Bros. Circus. Heron was with him serving as assistant manager and manager of the midway pit show.

In 1927 Heron was named manager of the Downie show, a position he held for the next three seasons. In 1929 he also manager of the pit show. By the late 1920s Downie was getting old and in poor health. Early in 1929 Downie sold the show to Charles Sparks, but bought it back from him before the season opened. However in early 1930 he again sold the show to Sparks. Downie then retired from show business.

Sparks retained Heron as manager but be-

fore the season got under way Sparks sold the Downie Bros. Circus to Heron on April 1, 1930. Roger Boyd advises that the sale document listed a price of \$50,000.00, of which \$25,000.00 was paid in cash with a note for the balance to be paid in nine months with a four percent interest on January 1, 1931. Heron operated the Downie show with some success but sold it back to Sparks on September 12, 1930 at Pittston, Pennsylvania. Boyd has the original note marked "paid in full" by Sparks. Boyd is of

Dorsey Bros. Circus poster advertising Nemo. Used in Pleasantville, Iowa September 4, 1929. Roger Boyd collection.

**DORSEY  
BROS.**  
World **SHOWS**  
Toured  
**PRESENTS**  
**NEMO**  
America's Smallest Performing  
**Baby Elephant**

**Will Exhibit Here**  
**101 AM** **INTERNOON & NIGHT**  
**WED. SEPT.**  
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THIS TICKET COURTESY OF—  
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Merchant ticket used by World Bros. Circus in 1933. Roger Boyd collection.

the opinion that Sparks also refunded to Heron the \$25,000.00 down payment. He points out that there was no default as the note was not due until January 1, 1931. The sale was a mutual arrangement in which Sparks wanted the show again and Heron desired to let it go. Possibly the adverse effects of the depression on all forms of show business entered into Heron's decision.

In any event Jimmy Heron was back in the circus business in 1931. He and William (Honest Bill) Newton, Jr. formed the Motor Circus Corporation of America to operate the Walter L. Main Circus. A year before Newton and Walter L. Main had organized the National Show Company to field a medium size motorized show using the Main title. Evidently the Newton-Main deal had not been satisfactory, and Newton formed a new partnership with Jimmy Heron. The Main title was again used in 1931. Some of the equipment and animals came from Newton, the rest was furnished by Heron. The bulk of the property was from the 1930 show.

Heron made a significant purchase in April 1931 when he bought the elephant Nemo, and a vehicle to transport him from George P. Dorsey of Chicago, Illinois. The bill of sale in the Boyd collection is dated April 22, 1931. It read, "Received of Mrs. Marie Heron the sum of two thousand dollars for one male elephant named Nemo, about seven years old, which is my personal property and free from any and all claims." A separate bill of sale covered one Chevrolet Express type chassis at a price of \$500.00.

Through the years as a circus owner Heron seemed to prefer Chevrolet trucks and often advertised for a mechanic to handle that make of truck.

George Dorsey had obtained Nemo in 1927 to go on his small motorized Dorsey Bros. Circus. The animal was then about three years old. Nemo remained on that show until he was sold to Jimmy Heron. For the next three seasons there were other ele-

phants on the Heron shows, but starting late in the 1933 season Nemo was the sole member of the herd.

In the early months of 1931 Honest Bill Newton and Heron framed their new Walter L. Main show at Jefferson, Ohio. According to the *Billboard* some fifteen more vehicles were used than during the previous season. Reports stated the show would have eight cages, several new sixteen foot semis, and a goodly number of animals. A daily street parade would be given. In all probability the "eight" cages did not mean that number of separate vehicles. Such reports often meant only eight cage compartments of which several might be on a single truck. The Erie Litho Company had been contracted to furnish a line of special billing paper. During the early 1930s the Walter L. Main show used some beautiful posters of which a surprisingly large number have survived.

Following the 1931 season the show wintered in Winchester, Virginia. Then important happenings took place. Joining the show as one of the owners was Fred Buchanan. Honest Bill pulled out, but some of his animals may have remained. In any event the owners of the 1932 show were listed as James Heron and Fred Buchanan. Buchanan had operated the fifteen car Robbins Bros. Circus in 1931 which ended suddenly in Mobile, Alabama and afterwards the notorious "red lighting" incident took place. Buchanan lost all of the physical equipment of the show to William P. Hall who held a mortgage, and he also lost his former quarters in Granger, Iowa on forfeiture of a bank loan. However Buchanan still had some funds and had expressed a desire in public to soon get back into the cir-

World Bros. seat lumber semi no. 40, on the lot in Shelby, North Carolina. Roger Boyd collection.



cus game. He stated that it would have to be with a motorized show as a small railer couldn't operate any more due to the heavy cost in the business depression.

So Fred Buchanan joined with Heron and they built the 1932 show into the largest that Heron was associated with in the 1930s. Although Buchanan was indeed a part owner, he more or less stayed in the background. Heron was the up front manager. The show began with the Walter L. Main title and featured a street parade. While in New England the Fox Film Company made a fine documentary. The "short subject" was shown in theaters throughout the country. Roger Boyd secured a print of the original and transferred it to 8 mm and distributed it to circus fans. This film is a marvelous account of the large 1932 show.

The great depression took its toll on the Walter L. Main show as both financial and other problems developed. Roger Boyd



Lion act semi-trailer on World Bros. lot in 1933. Roger Boyd collection.

pointed out that Buchanan had brought over many of his people who had been with the 1931 Robbins show. In mid-season the title was changed to Bostock's Wild Animal Circus, and still later in the season the show was called Cody Ranch Wild West. The show had started out with a fine performance, including a Historic America spec for the George Washington Bicentennial Celebration, but as the season went on everything went downhill. Before the end of the tour some fifteen trucks were dropped according to a *Billboard* story. While still struggling

one Tom Gorman loaned the show funds but that didn't save it. The show went under with all kinds of legal and financial entanglements. Finally it moved into quarters at the 4-H Club fairgrounds in Charleston, West Virginia. A separate article will later deal with the large 1932 show

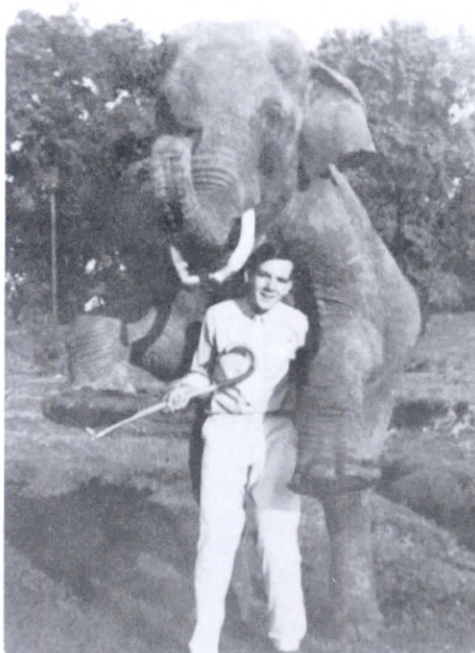
and probably 1931, hence many details on those two seasons are not covered here.

Came 1933 and with it Roosevelt and his New Deal. It wasn't until May that the affairs of Jimmy Heron and the Walter L. Main show were settled. The May 20, 1933 *Billboard* in an article headed, "Main Property to Gorman" said that freed of legal entanglements the Walter L. Main Circus which had been quartered at the 4-H fairgrounds in Charleston, West Virginia for the winter had taken to the road. Circuit Judge Arthur P. Hudson entered an order confirming the sale of the circus properties to Thomas Gorman of New York City for \$4,600.00, representing the amount of judgement obtained in a suit against Walter L. Main, James Heron and Fred Buchanan. Attorneys said that Gorman was financing the circus.

The early part of the 1933 season is the most confusing of any of the Heron shows. A new title was used, World Bros., Circus which had been used by Buchanan on his rail show in 1923. Walter L. Main, himself, placed an advertisement in the May 27, 1933 *Billboard* informing that he had leased his title to States Variety Enterprise Inc. and would not be responsible for any debts. Thus the 1933 version of the Walter L. Main Circus would have no connection with the 1932 outfit.

As for Gorman, he had for years been a motion picture and vaudeville executive in New York City. He had been with RKO Pictures and had also managed the Hippodrome in New York. He had no previous experience in outdoor show business. Some published accounts say Gorman was owner of the 1933 World Bros. Circus, others put him in an executive capacity. Jimmy Heron was present as road manager of the show and still owned the elephant Nemo, and most likely other properties. In any event he did have enough equipment, or was able to obtain it, to go on his own later in the 1933 season.

A *Billboard* account in early September said that World Bros. was doing good business in Ohio. This time the report had Tom Gorman as general manager and James Heron as manager. The show had forty trucks and privately owned cars. Doc Young had the pit show and Buzz Barton the wild west after-show. Bert Wallace was equestrian director; Burns O'Sullivan, superintendent. Jean Belasco handled press and the front door. In the performance were Capt. Wallace's lion act; Ray Goody, wire act; Hood Sis-



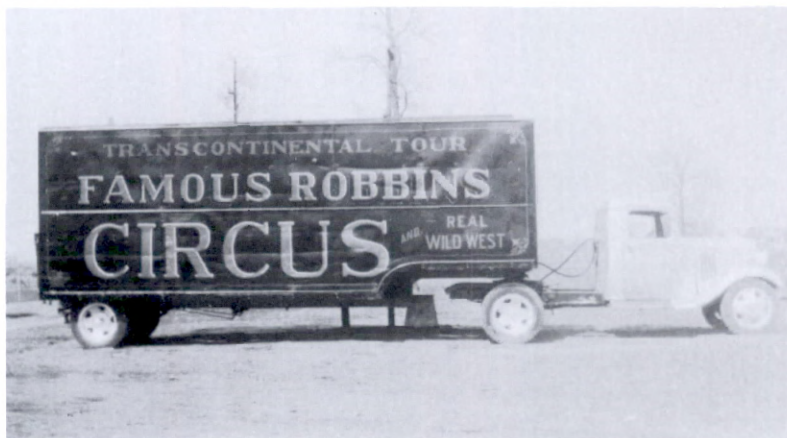
Roger Boyd with Nemo, performing male elephant, on World Bros. Circus in 1934. Roger Boyd collection.

ters, contortionists and gymnasts; the Wiggins Troupe, acrobats; Cupid the trained pony; two elephant acts; a pony drill and trained goats.

During the first years of the 1930s the life blood of the small and medium truck circuses was the so called merchant's ticket plan. Through a promotional tie-in with various individual or groups of merchants, or sometimes a newspaper, circus patrons could obtain a ticket at discount prices.

In the early fall of 1933 when it was time to begin the stands in the South, Heron and Gorman split. Gorman took what was probably the bulk of the show and went into quarters in Jersey City, New Jersey, occupying

Semi-trailer used to carry Nemo on Famous Robbins. Photo was taken in Savannah, Georgia winter quarters a few weeks before the 1935 season opened. Roger Boyd collection.



the site of an abandoned Ford plant. A new show would be framed over the winter. According to a *Billboard* article Fred Buchanan and a crew were engaged to build the show. Some time ago an eye-witness wrote me that he saw trucks in the fall of 1933 going into the Jersey City site lettered World Bros. Circus. In the spring of 1934 a new title, Gorman Bros. Circus, entered the circus world. Associated with Tom Gorman were Fred Buchanan and Pat Casey who had been a power in vaudeville and was at the time treasurer of the Variety Manager's Association. For the next three seasons Gorman Bros. would go out in the spring, playing a limited, rather short route in the Northeast. Gorman took the elephant Jap with him and Heron took Nemo.

Heron also took the lion act of four, sometimes five, animals and the three den semi which transported them. This act consisted of all of the caged menagerie animals. Roger Boyd advises that after 1932 none of the Heron shows carried a menagerie.

Heron continued to use the World Bros. title and routed the show down through Virginia and the Carolinas in the fall of 1933 and after closing went into quarters in Allendale, South Carolina. Although there was little notice in the *Billboard*, it did say that Heron made a successful southern tour.

The January 20, 1934 *Billboard* reported that Jimmy Heron would go out during the coming spring with his World Bros. Circus and Tom Gorman with his Gorman Bros. Thus two separate circuses evolved from the single show of the previous year.

During the winter months of 1934 while in the Allendale quarters Heron organized and built his show into the fifteen truck class, a size it would remain during the final years of its existence. Charles Donahue came on as financier for Heron and served as secretary-treasurer. They organized the Southern Circus Corporation with James Heron as president. Roger Boyd reports that Donahue had once operated a burlesque show which had traveled on its own railroad cars. He describes Donahue as being very conservative with money when financing the Heron show. Donahue and Heron became a successful team.

A number of additional trucks were acquired, one being a most interesting vehicle. It was Andrew Downie's former office truck from the Downie show. During the winter of 1933-34 Charles Sparks, now owner of Downie Bros., built a large new office-ticket semi at his Macon, Georgia quarters, thus making the old office truck surplus. It is believed that Heron then purchased it for the 1934 season.

The 1934 season was one of the longest and probably the most successful of any of the Heron tours. The April 28, 1934 *Billboard* reported on the show shortly after it opened. It said that World Bros. had good business in Lynchburg, Virginia. In the program were acrobatics, clown and animal acts, including a lion and elephant. The Knight Troupe of tetter-board acrobats was a feature. Other acts included: Echo, Japanese foot juggler and Robert Audrey and Mary Mansfield sharpshooters. Capt. Walker's wild animal act was the closing number using four lions.

Roger Boyd worked Nemo the male elephant in the performance. Nemo had grown rapidly and now had a pretty good set of tusks. The animal had been broken to perform at an early age and in the Boyd collection is a Dorsey Bros. window card used in 1929 proclaiming Nemo, America's smallest performing elephant. Boyd says he worked him for several years on the Heron shows, and the animal was recognized as one of the best performing bulls in the country. During those seasons Nemo was very easy to handle, but as we shall later learn that changed. In 1936 Nemo was billed as the Mighty Tusko and in 1938 as Goliath, weighing a ton more than Jumbo.

World Bros. played Bristol, Rhode Island on May 21. A fine review of the show compiled by a circus fan is in the Pfening Archives. From this report we have an over all report on the 1934 Heron show.

The trucks were: light plant truck, office truck, pole truck, concession truck, lion cage semi with four compartments, horse truck, cookhouse truck and seven more trucks for baggage and stock. A bally trailer with sound system was pulled by a car. A trailer cage used for the pit show. There were four cars and house trailers for a total eighteen trucks and six trailers.

The big top was an 80 with one forty and two 30s. The seating was star back reserves and blues. The marquee had three poles. There was a two pole pad room and a two pole cookhouse tent. On the midway were a three pole side show tent and a two pole tent gorilla pit show as well as two juice joint tents.

There were nine banners in front of the side show as well as a bally platform and two ticket boxes. The side show attractions pictured on the single banners were a mentalist, animals, Scotch bagpipers, impalement act, snake charm-



Large semi-trailer used for the Shufflin' Sam's Georgia Minstrels in Famous Robbins winter quarters prior to the start of the 1935 tour. Roger Boyd collection.

er and Punch and Judy. Double banners (in addition to the entrance) pictured fan dancers and a minstrel show. Attractions inside the side show were a small cage with a lion cub on a platform; cage on another platform with four small lion cubs; Punch and Judy; six piece black band and a girl dancer on a large platform; palmistry booth; two camels and the baby elephant Nemo. On a long platform were five small cages containing a cat, a monkey and cat, and four additional monkeys. Additional attractions on small platforms were a magician, sword box and a snake charmer. There was a cooch show blowoff. [The cooch show featuring a girl purported to take off her clothes was offered at an additional charge to "Men only."]

The prices for admission to the big show were twenty-five cents and ten cents with a merchant's ticket. The reserve star back seats were an additional fifteen cents. The side show cost ten cents and the pit shows were five cents each.

Famous Robbins Circus office truck in 1935. This vehicle was Andrew Downie's office during the years he owned Downie Bros. Circus from 1926 to 1929. Dunwoody collection.



The performance was presented in one wooden ring curb and two canvas rings. The band consisted of seven pieces. The performance was as follows:

Display No. 1 Introduction of Bud Horne, western star.

Display No. 2 Single men doing aerial traps over rings one and three.

Display No. 3 Five ponies, two dogs and a monkey in center ring.

Display No. 4 Swinging ladders over rings one and three.

Display No. 5 Pony drill in center ring.

Display No. 6 Clowns.

Display No. 7 Japanese man and women with head balancing act over ring two.

Display No. 8 Clowns using two boys in a chair gag.

Display No. 9 Trained pigs in center ring.

Display No. 10 Three clowns.

Display No. 11 Five dog act in center ring.

Display No. 12 Concert announcement featuring wild west and the pony Cupid.

Display No. 13 Knight Troupe of four on low wire in center ring.

Display No. 14 Clown number.

Display No. 15 Japanese perch act in center ring.

Display No. 16 Baby elephant worked by a lady.

Display No. 17 Three clowns.

Display No. 18 Iron jaw presented by a girl over center ring.

Display No. 19 Japanese lady and man juggling and balancing act in center ring.

Display No. 20 Second concert announcement.

Display No. 21 Lady working single high school horse in center ring.

Display No. 22 Three clowns.

Display No. 23 Knight Troupe in tetter-board act in center ring.

Display No. 24 Lion act presented by Capt. Walker.

After Bristol the show played Attleboro, Clinton, Marlboro, Salem and Newburyport, Massachusetts.

The long 1934 season closed at Kissimmee, Florida December 1 and the show moved into quarters at Savannah, Georgia. James M. Beach who had served as general agent for the show told the *Billboard* that it had been one of the longest and best seasons in his thirty-three years on the road. The tour covered 22,505 miles, according to Beach, and dates were played in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ma-

ryland, Delaware, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and Florida.

During the latter part of 1934 the show began using the title of Famous Robbins Circus. Boyd says for the next few seasons Heron often switched titles. One reason was that billing paper lying idle on printing house shelves could be picked up at bargain prices. These sheets had originally been printed for various shows and acts and sometimes

the Heron performers had to be billed differently according to what appeared on the paper. For example the man who worked the Heron lion act for several seasons was Swede Johnson, but he was billed variously as "Capt. Wallace" or Capt. Sells," and in one report he was "Capt. Walker." These various names were also reflected in newspaper ads. Another reason for changing titles, one used by many shows, was when the show would repeat territory played the previous season. Grift shows would often change titles for obvious reasons, but legitimate shows would do the same especially in the days of the great depression.

Money was so scarce the natives would pass up a show they saw only last year but if a new one came along they would dig down for a spare quarter to view it. In any event several seasons saw the Heron show use two titles.

The Savannah quarters was a busy place in the first weeks of 1935. It was decided to begin the season with the Famous Robbins moniker so all vehicles were decorated and lettered with that name. For the first few seasons the Heron shows played a generally eastern route moving up the east coast, spending ample time in Pennsylvania and other states in the middle Atlantic region, the into New England, and finally backtracking to the south.

The June 15, 1935 *Billboard* gave a nice description of the Famous Robbins Circus which played Ambridge, Pennsylvania on

Working men with a tow rope pulling the Famous Robbins office truck on a muddy lot in 1935. Dunwoody collection.



Famous Robbins lion cage semi in 1935. Swede Johnson worked the act billed as Capt. Wallace. Dunwoody collection.

June 8. It said that in ten days the show would receive a new one hundred foot round top with three forties and a large forty by forty foot marquee. The show already had a new 850 seat grandstand section. The show was owned by the Southern Circus Corporation with James Heron as manager. Famous Robbins was said to travel on forty-seven show owned trucks and thirty-two privately owned cars and trailers. This number is unrealistic as about fifteen trucks, both straight bed and semis, would be more correct.

It was noted that a major portion of the performance was taken up by George Barton's trained dogs, ponies and military mules. The show was to play the Pittsburgh area for three weeks and then head west rather than continue the usual trek into New England.

The circus later returned eastward and then headed south. In September Famous Robbins was in North Carolina. An interesting note published in the *Billboard* at the close of the season gave a good indication of the heavy competition between circuses during the 1935 season. The example of Rocky Mount, North Carolina, population 21,412, was given. That town had five circuses during the fall: Famous Robbins, September 14; Barnett Bros., September 18; Downie Bros., September 28; Cole Bros, October 12 and Ringling-Barnum, November 2. Although not mentioned the town witnessed two street parades, Downie Bros. and Cole Bros.

During the last weeks of the season there was a change of title for Heron's show. The

new moniker of Bond Bros. Circus was used for the forty stands played in Georgia before management called it a season. The show went into quarters at the fairgrounds in Milledgeville, Georgia.

Roger Boyd says that Heron was able to pick up some old Bond paper, hence the use of that name. Although neither Boyd nor the author could recall a Bond Bros. show in recent years prior to 1935 Roger is

certain the show picked up this old paper. According to the Sturtevant files Joe McMahon, who had a reputation of running strong grift outfits and changing titles frequently, did use the name of Bond Bros. in 1896. Printing houses hung onto "dead" show paper for many years hoping to eventually move it.

A note in *Billboard* in December said that business was good during the lengthy Georgia tour and that many of the Heron show troupers were spending the winter in Milledgeville or in near-by Macon.

An interesting photo taken in 1935 pictures a large number of workingmen on a gang rope pulling the Famous Robbins office-ticket truck. Roger Boyd said the show, as well as others in the medium motorized class, had far more workingmen than those ordinarily carried on a fifteen truck outfit. This was because of the depression and any kind of work was difficult to find. They were glad to get a job with Heron. Boyd says the pay was small but the show had a good cookhouse with Dixie Adams as chef. Three squares were most welcome anywhere in the early and mid-1930s.

#### THE 1936 SEASON

It was now 1936, a presidential year which traditionally was not good for the circus business. Roosevelt was running for a second term and the Republicans nominated Alf Landon to oppose him. There had been a slow but gradual improvement in business conditions since hitting rock bottom in July 1932. The 1934 circus season had been good for many shows and while 1935 had seen some shows do well there had been a falling off with others. However both seasons had been a vast improvement over the bad years of the very early 1930s and a pile of new shows, many of them quite small, hit the road beginning in 1934 and 1935 and reaching a peak in 1936.

As far as the rest of the circus fraternity knew Heron would continue in 1936 with the Bond Bros. title. All bits of information as well as advertisements appearing in the *Billboard* during the winter and early spring referred to the show by that name.





George Barton and Marguerite Faust with horse on Famous Robbins lot in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin July 22, 1935. Pfening Archives.

The February 1, 1936 *Billboard* reported that Jimmy Heron who was wintering his Bond Bros. Circus at Milledgeville, Georgia was soon expected back from the East and would make his headquarters at the Central Hotel in Macon. Charles Donahue was in charge of the show quarters and was a weekly visitor to Macon. In those years there was a vast circus colony wintering in Macon, not only troupers of Downie Bros. Circus which wintered in that city at Central City Park, but also from many other shows.

A week later the *Billboard* said that Bond Bros. recently lost by death a prize baboon "King Kong." It was also noted that George Barton was out of the hospital and was now in charge of the Milledgeville quarters.

The February 15 *Billboard* carried this advertisement. "Circus privileges for sale, candy stand, balloons and novelties, pop corn, candy floss. For sale 80 ft. round top with 3 middle pieces, stored in Michigan, cheap for cash. Wanted-experienced band leader and musicians. Address Bond Bros. Circus, Box 10, Milledgeville." The big top offered for sale was probably the tent which was replaced by the new one in mid season 1935.

For the next several weeks little information came from the Heron show. One item

George Barton's truck on the Robbins lot in Sturgeon Bay in 1935. Pfening Archives.



said that James Beach, general agent; Charles Donahue, treasurer; and Frank Satiro of Bond Bros. were spending a few days in Savannah and would make a short tour of Florida. Bob Zell would again be with Bond Bros. as banner solicitor, making his second season with James Heron, and that J. D. McNeeley would be on the Bond Bros. advance during the coming season.

The show had two advertisements in the April 4, 1936 *Billboard*. The first read: "Side show people wanted for Bond Bros. Circus. Oriental dancers, must be young. Boss Canvasman and A-1 mechanic for Chevrolet trucks. Address Jack Sampson, Box 160, Milledgeville, Georgia."

The second read: "Circus musicians wanted. For circus opening in Georgia early in April. For big show white band-trombone, cornet, clarinet and saxophone. Good sleeping truck accommodations, Verne Perry, leader. Want sober billposters and billers immediately, also truck mechanic and man to handle electric light plants. Address manager Circus, Milledgeville, Georgia."

Note that in the second ad no circus title is given. The next mention of the Heron circus in the trade press used the title of Famous Robbins and indeed it was decided to drop the Bond name and return to the title which had been used at the start of the previous season. Several variations of the Robbins name appeared in news accounts and advertisements during the 1936 season. At times it was Robbins Bros., other times it was even Yankee Robbins.

Roger Boyd gives us a look at the physical appearance of the 1936 Famous Robbins Circus. He says the major tents were the big top, a ninety foot round with one forty and two thirties; side show, padroom and cookhouse. In the later were fed the performers and workmen. The trucks were painted red with yellow lettering.

From photos it appears the vehicles were about evenly divided between straight beds and semis. Semis were used to haul the elephant Nemo, the lion act cage, seat lumber and even Shufflin Sam's



Famous Robbins midway in Kewaunee, Wisconsin July 20, 1935. Pfening Archives.

Georgia Minstrels, an important part of the side show. Straight beds loaded the light plant, band sleeper, and the office-ticket wagon. All vehicles appear to have been titled and some were pictorially decorated. There were a few exceptions to the red and yellow color scheme. An exact count of vehicles is unknown but the show owned



Rex the motion picture dog with his owner Tex A. Shubach, on left, Famous Robbins in 1935. Pfening Archives.

trucks numbered about fifteen. When the show was offered for sale in 1937 that was the number listed in the advertisement.

Photos also indicate that the side show top had three center poles and was about a sixty round with two thirties. No menagerie was carried other than the elephant and the lion act. These animals were housed in the side show when not performing. About a dozen horses and ponies were carried, some being privately owned.

There were probably twenty or more privately owned vehicles, living trailers and trucks, plus automobiles to pull the trailers. Famous Robbins was in the medium motorized class but still presented an impressive

sight moving in convoy along the highways or set up on the lot. The season was during the final years motorized shows could move in convoy as soon after state highway patrols prohibited them.

The 1936 circus season was now at hand. Railroad circuses going out numbered four with three flat car type and one tunnel or gilly show. The list included Ringling-Barnum on 90 cars, Cole Bros.-Clyde Beatty on 30 cars, Al G. Barnes on 30 cars and Cooper Bros. on 2 cars. Notably absence was Hagenbeck-Wallace, which the Ringling owners decided to leave in quarters.

Motorized shows were Downie Bros., Tom Mix, Russell Bros., Rice Bros., Lewis Bros., Barnett Bros., Seils-Sterling, Mighty Haag, Bockus & Kilonis, Walter L. Main, Famous Robbins, Reo Bros., Kay Bros., Eddy Bros. (new title for Hunt), Barney Bros., Joe B. Webb, Milliken Bros., Seal Bros., Atterbury Bros., Vanderburg Bros., Norris Bros., Silver Bros., Escalante Bros., Yankee Patterson, Bailey Bros., Martin Bros., Schell Bros., Beers-Barnes, Bud Hawkins, Gorman Bros., Conroy Bros., Card Bros., Wizard Novelty, Robinson Bros., Red Lunsford Wild West, Maynard Bros. and Tiger Bill Wild West.

The 1936 season showed a marked decline in the number of street parades. Both Tom Mix and Downie Bros. discontinued parades after 1935 and Barnett Bros. after 1934. Still featuring the daily marches in 1936 were Cole Bros.-Clyde Beatty, the only railer parading, and Rice Bros., Seal Bros. and Bailey Bros., the latter only part of the season. None of Heron's circuses had paraded since 1932.

The show had a printed program in 1936 by means of *Circus Magazine*, published by a company of the same name in New York City. It was a 7 by 10 publication with sixty-six pages on a good grade of paper. It contained write-ups of eighteen circuses, most of them small or medium size motorized shows, and at least one indoor show and seven carnivals. One to three pages of text and photos were devoted to each show. Famous Robbins had two pages, one with the program and the other with a newspaper ad design. The front cover was attractive with circus artwork and at the top appeared the name of the particular show which was using the service and the page number for the program. It sold for ten cents. The inside and

**Largest Wild Animal Circus Ever To Visit Seneca**

**SENECA** One Day Only **FRI. SEPT.** Two Performances 2 P.M. and 8 P.M.



**BOND BROS.**

**BIG 3 RING WILD ANIMAL CIRCUS**

100 WILD ANIMALS 100 AERIALISTS 26 CLOWNS

WITH CAPT. SELLS AND HIS LIONS

THE GREATEST SHOW IN DIXIE

TIM TINKER America's favorite Western star "In Person," with his Hollywood company of Cowboys, Cowgirls, Indians and Mexican Bull Fighters.

"KLIMATIANO TROUPE" of European equestrians in feats of daring horsemanship.

WILD ANIMALS from every clime - all trained - performing in the big steel arena.

THRILLING Aerialists, amazing Acrobats, Beautiful girls.

Educated dogs, ponies, sheep, goats, trained pigs.

**Prices Reduced**

**Children 15c Adults 35c**

Heron used the Bond Bros. Circus title in Seneca, South Carolina late in the 1935 season. Pfening Archives.

rear covers carried national advertising in color and additional ads were scattered throughout the magazine. The *Circus Magazine* was published from the late 1920s to the mid 1930s and provided an excellent method for smaller shows to have a printed program.

The title on the program read "Robbin's." This had been picked up from the newspaper advertisement furnished to the publisher by the show. All of the ads for the show that season carried the wrong spelling. This was another version of the title appearing that year.

The program read as follows:

Opening Spectacular big parade and grand entry with Verne Perry's broadcasting band from Savannah, Georgia.

Display No. 1 Yukon Huskies, bareback riding dogs and monkeys. Presented by George Barton.

Display No. 2 Dainty girls swinging high in mid air. Margie, Marie, Mazie and Marguerite.

Display No. 3 "Mile a minute" the unridable mule. \$5.00 to anyone who can ride him.

Display No. 4 Carrying perch. An act of strength, balancing and daring. Barth and Meyers.

Display No. 5 Bumpsey Anthony and his funsters in "Bicycle repair shop."

Display No. 6

"Rex" the original wonder dog of the movies. Presented by his trainer and owner Tex A. Schubach.

Display No. 7 Feats of suppleness and skill by Mlle. Margie.

Display No. 8 Farmer Brown from Bibb County, Georgia and his educated goats.

Display No. 9 The upside down man from the land of cherry blossoms, Frank Satiro.

Display No. 10 Famous Robbins' military shetland ponies. Presented by George E. Barton.

Display No. 11 The girl on the flying trapeze-Mlle Marguerite.

Display No. 12 One of the world's best trained elephants, Tusko (Nemo.) Presented by Roger Boyd.

Display No. 13 Tex A. Schubach with Rex, the famous movie dog, in feats of human intelligence.

Display No. 14 Sensational tetterboard act with an unbelievable somersault from the tetter board to the chair by Barth and Meyer.

Display No. 15 The funny clowns with Reno McCrea.

Display No. 16 George Barton and his dancing and high school horse "Colonel."

Display No. 17 Comedy hurdle mule presented by Reno McCrea and the clowns.

Display No. 18 "Buddy," the high wire walking dog. On a thread of steel blindfolded.

Display No. 19 Famous Robbins' leaping greyhounds, featuring "Sir Mack."

Display No. 20 The international favorites, the Barton troupe of bareback riders.

Display No. 21 Capt. Wallace (Swede Johnson) and his fighting African lions.

The show opened its season in its quarters town of Milledgeville, Georgia on April 11 and the April 25, 1936 *Billboard* covered the event as follows:

"Famous Robbins Circus, Milledgeville, Ga. April 18. First class circus entertainment at a fast pace is found in the performance of the Famous Robbins Circus, which began its

Famous Robbins band sleeper on left and light plant on right in 1936. Roger Boyd photo in Elbirn collection.





Famous Robbins Circus on a lot during the 1936 season. Roger Boyd photo in Elbirn collection.

tour here April 11. Three performances were given. The first was at 10:30 am at which 700 inmates of the Georgia State Hospital were guests of the management.

"The Robbins show has wintered in the Middle Georgia fairgrounds, coming in late last November as the Bond Bros. Circus. Opening was sponsored by the fair association and it was the first circus in many years to play inside the city.

"Show equipment is neat and in good shape. Big top is a 90 with two 30s and one 40 middles. Performance is given in three rings and a steel arena. Arena is located in rear of middle ring.

"George Barton is equestrian director and announcer; also works the Barton riding act. Performance on the first night ran one hour and twenty-seven minutes and had a few rough edges. The opening spec features Marie Vann, soprano, singing 'Roses of Picardy' in good voice.

"Among principal winners were Bound-ing Johnsons; the Barth tetter-board act; Frank Satiro, in feats of hand balancing; elephant act with one unusually well trained tusker and the Barton riding act. Wild animal act in arena, seven lions worked by Capt. Swede Johnson, closes show. Concert features Rex, movie dog. Music is furnished by Verne Perry and seven piece band. Bumpy Anthony heads clown contingent.

"Business at opening stand was declared 'satisfactory,' and a two-thirds at night.

"Many visitors from Downie show, including Mr. and Mrs. Charles Sparks, Charles Katz, Harry Mack and Jack Hoxie.

"Show is under management of James Heron; advance under direction of James M. Beach, general agent; side show managed by Jack Sampson.

"Delegation of Milledgeville civic leaders, headed by Capt. J. H. Ennis, invited show to winter here again."

After the opening the show headed north through Georgia playing four additional stands in the state at Griffin, Marietta, Cartersville and Dalton. Well known circus

trouper E. W. Adams told the *Billboard* that he had seen the show enroute from Griffin to Marietta when it passed through Atlanta. Ad-

This 1936 Famous Robbins newspaper ad listed Capt. Roger Boyd. Pfening Archives.

**FIRST BIG CIRCUS HERE IN YEARS**

**GO THENBURG**

One Day ONLY **Aug. 15**

Afternoon 2:15 • Night 8:00

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*For 50 years America's Favorite Show*

**FAMOUS**

**ROBBINS**

**CIRCUS**

**3 RINGS**

**STEEL ARENA**

**50 FEATURE ACTS**

**CAPT. WALLACE AND HIS AFRICAN LIONS**



**MENAGERIE**

**TRAINED WILD ANIMALS**

*Wild West and*

---

**286 People . . 20 Clowns . . 2 Bands**

**SEE Capt. Roger Boyd and His Herd of performing Elephants**

---

SPECIAL ADDED FEATURE:  
"REX," The Original Movie Dog and Company, direct from Hollywood!

---

Performances given under auspices of  
GO THENBURG VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT  
A percentage of every ticket to the Big Circus goes to the  
Gothenburg Fire Department.

---

Reduced Admission: 25c	CIRCUS GROUNDS—
CHILDREN ————— 40c	Firemen's Ball Park
ADULTS —————	Free Parking!

ams said that fine weather had prevailed at all of the Georgia stands. It was noted that Adams would join Cole Bros.-Clyde Beatty Circus at Rochester, Indiana for the opening canvas stand May 4 in the ticket department.

Robbins left Georgia before the large Downie Bros. show opened but both circuses were all over the place and competition was keen during the early weeks of the season. A report in the May 9 *Billboard* said that the Mighty Haag show had been out all winter and at Franklin, Georgia April 21 it was enlarged by four trucks and would proceed on its trip northward at its regular season size. The show played LaFayette, Georgia April 25 and then moved into Tennessee. Mighty Haag was operated by Mrs. Ernest Haag, widow of the show's founder.

Famous Robbins beat the Haag show into Tennessee by going into that state April 7 at Dayton and moved northward through it in six stands. It went into Kentucky at Middlesboro April 24. Eight dates came in the Bluegrass state mainly in the coal regions in the eastern part. A single date was played in West Virginia on May 4. The show then was back into Kentucky at Paintsville the next day which was followed by Prestonsburg, Pikeville, Louisa and Olive Hill.

The show moved into Ohio at Jackson May 11 and played five more dates in the Buckeye State and then headed into Indiana for five stands. Illinois was crossed in three stands, Hoopeston, Peru and Sterling.

The 1936 route carried the show farther west than ever before. While ordinarily limiting its tour to the eastern states Robbins had ventured as far west as Wisconsin in 1935. Many Robbins trucks had been lettered "Transcontinental Tour" and although 1936 and 1937 would see the show as far west as Montana it never went to the Pacific coast. It might be recalled that a Robbins titled show did move from coast to coast in 1931 when Sam B. Dill's motorized show, which started that season using the Gentry title, made the trip. Dill's show started in the Los Angeles area and moved completely across the country to the Atlantic states.

Heron's 1936 version of Robbins went into Iowa at Bellevue May 27 and following three additional stands moved into Minnesota at Albert Lea on June 1.

So far *Billboard* had carried no recent re-

port from the show, but there had been an advertisement in the May 23, 1936 issue which read: "Circus wants. White musicians for big show band, cornet, trombone, clarinet. For side show, colored musicians, minstrels, ticket seller to make second openings. House car sleeping accommodations for all. For the advance, sober, reliable man to handle the brigade, also bill-posters and lithographers that can drive trucks. Billers wire Ray Swan or James M. Beach. All other, Manager, YANKEE ROBBINS CIRCUS." Several Indiana and Illinois stands were listed.

Six stands were played in Minnesota, then the show went farther west into North Dakota for three weeks, playing a total of seventeen stands. A tour of South Dakota started June 27 at Lemmon, followed by McLaughlin, Mobridge and Eureka. On July 1 the show jumped back into North Dakota at Ellendale, then returned to South Dakota for Britton the next day. The show then returned to Minnesota for fifteen stands, giving thorough coverage of the northern lake areas.

It was westward again when Robbins headed into North Dakota July 21 at Grafton. Four more dates saw the show completely cross the state and move into Montana July 26 at Culbertson. Seven stands were played in Montana with the final coming at Fairview on August 1. The next two days were required to travel to South Dakota for stands at Rapid City and Hot Springs. Chadron August 6 was the first stand in Nebraska and it was followed by ten more, the final coming at Grant on August 18.

A swing through Colorado came next, beginning at Holyoke and ending at Wray August 28. During these long weeks the *Billboard* remained silent on Robbins activities. A single note of minor interest stated that John Landes, bass player in the Robbins band, had dental problems and had to leave the show.

There was an advertisement in the August 15, 1936 *Billboard* which read: "Wanted side show people for ROBBINS BROS. CIRCUS. side show. Boss canvasman, must keep equipment repaired. Inside man doing Punch and magic. Ross Heath answer. Oriental dancer, must be young. Colored musicians and comedian, must be hot. First class mechanic for Chevrolet trucks. Address Jack Sampson." Several Nebraska dates were listed.

A week later the August 22, 1936 *Billboard* contained another "Robbins Bros." ad again asking for people to fill the same positions in the side show. A second advertisement in the same issue used the official version of the Robbins title. It read: "Musicians wanted for the Famous Robbins Circus. Want for big show band, trombone,



Famous Robbins midway with side show banner line season of 1936. Roger Boyd photo in Elbirn collection.

clarinet that doubles sax, other musicians wire. Housecar sleeping quarters. Circus acts that do two or more turns, novelty, feature acts, useful truck show circus people. Wire manager, Famous Robbins Circus. Long season."

There was a short notice a week later which said that Hario and Mario (probably with the side show) recently with the Famous Robbins Circus were then with Johnny Bejano on Hennies Bros. carnival.

Following the Colorado tour the show went into Kansas at Fort Francis for eight dates moving first into the north western part of the state then going south. Final stand was at Liberal September 7 and according to a notation on the route sheet three performances were given that day.

For a number of weeks the show had been in areas where one of the hottest and driest summers on record was in progress. Although nothing appeared in the trade publication telling how Famous Robbins was affected by the heat there were many reports from other shows which told of the miserable travelling and living conditions caused by the high temperatures and the drastic effect it had at the ticket wagon.

The show entered the Texas panhandle at Perryman, then played Canadian, Pampa, Borger and Shamrock in the immediate area. Evidently business was very good here as according to the route sheet three performances were given in Pampa and Borger. Famous Robbins then proceeded on a Texas tour which would see the show move south then east following closely the northern border of the state for a number of dates before going almost due south to the Rio Grande.

The October 3, 1936 *Billboard* noted that a semi-trailer of the Famous Robbins Circus carrying five lions skidded into a ditch near

Wichita Falls, Texas and turned over on its side, but no serious damage was done to the cage and the animals were not injured. A photo of the overturned trailer appeared in the *Wichita Falls Times*. The extensive cutline below the photo read: "Five unassuming lions and three uncomfortable circus men spent several restless hours in the ditch Tuesday night about seven miles from Wichita Falls on the Seymour highway. Farmers living in the neighborhood slept peacefully throughout the

night, unaware of the near-escape menagerie until daylight Wednesday when the orange colored trailer was visible lying in the mud. The truck driver said the lions were well behaved after the first flurry of excitement when the truck slid into the ditch. The mud, they said, would not have been a handicap to their flying feet had the lions broken from the wrecked cage."

The show was in Del Rio on September 22, then played Eagle Pass, Crystal City, Cotulla and Laredo. It moved eastward toward the Gulf coast the followed the coast toward Louisiana. The final week in the Lone Star state saw Famous Robbins at Orange, Jasper, Lufkin, Nacogdoches, with the last stand coming at Center October 9. The Texas tour had lasted four plus weeks with Sunday's off 28 stands.

Following the lengthy Texas trip the show moved into Louisiana at Many October 10. The *Billboard* in an article dated October 17 reported that the Robbins show had come into that state on October 10 and was now moving southward with one day stops at all larger communities. It was noted that the high occupational tax charged by the State of Louisiana was keeping out most of the shows that usually played there during the fall season. The piece concluded that the show planned to make about a dozen stands before returning to Texas. Evidently those

Lion act cage in ditch near Wichita Falls, Texas September 17, 1936. Pfening Archives.



plans, if correctly stated, were changed as the show remained in Louisiana for twenty-five dates, the final coming at Lake Providence on November 4. Instead of going back to Texas the show went into Arkansas for dates in Eudora, McGehee, Warren and Damden. It then returned to Louisiana to play Haynesville, Homer, Ruston and Bastrop.

Famous Robbins returned to Arkansas for a single stand on November 14 at Crossett. It then moved on an off Sunday into Missouri, where the final stand of the 1936 season was played at Poplar Bluff on November 16. The show then went into winter quarters in Poplar Bluff.

The usual post season report did not appear in the trade publication as was common for many circuses. But Robert Zell, 24 hour man, visited the *Billboard* office in Cincinnati and reported he had a most enjoyable season and would again be with Famous Robbins in 1937.

In 1937 the *Billboard* carried a minimum of news of Jimmy Heron's Famous Robbins. The January 23, 1937 issue said that Heron was a weekend visitor in Macon, Georgia enroute from Worcester, Massachusetts to winter quarters of the Famous Robbins show at Poplar Bluff, Missouri. He stated that work was progressing rapidly at quarters and that the show would be enlarged. It also mentioned that James M. Beach would again be the show's general agent. Although not reported in the trade publication one long time Heron employee Roger Boyd would not be with the show in 1937. Instead he would go with the new Jack Hoxie Circus being organized in Raymond, Georgia.

Possibly it was not as yet decided what title Heron would use to begin the new season as an advertisement in the March 13, 1937 *Billboard* used none. It read: "For sale--Circus Manager, Poplar Bluff, Missouri, Four minute picture machine, installed in living trailer--\$200. One 5 k.w. Universal light plant, 110 volt--\$125, good condition. One National air calliope, 53 whistles, first class condition, \$75."

With Roger Boyd having left the show it has been difficult to research the 1937 season. No opening notice was published in the *Billboard* but it can be assumed as usual the initial stand came sometime in April. Likewise little is known of the early weeks route but it appears Heron again decided on a more westerly tour.

The June 26, 1937 *Billboard* carried an informative article on the show. The title was again Famous Robbins and it was at Philipsburg, Montana on June 19 where it had lost a matinee on account of a snowstorm, but at



The Famous Robbins show used this special paper for Rex, The Wonder Dog in 1936. It was printed by Triangle Poster Co. of Philadelphia. The background is blue and the lettering is red, with the dog in black. Pfenig Archives.

night there was an excellent house despite extraordinarily cold weather. Fred Pickins was equestrian director and the performance ran one a half hours.

The program was as follows. Tournament; Clark swinging ladder number; Frank Satiro family, Japanese jugglers and tumblers; Rosillo Sisters, wire; clown number; Smith Troupe of Russian Wolfhounds and collies, featuring Teddy, swinging wire dog; Pitkins and his Arabian trained horse; Elsie Satiro, tight wire; clowns; Bucking mule; Riddle Family, trapeze; Smith's dogs and ponies; clowns; Wiggins bar and ring act; First wild west concert announcement; Buck Steele with cowboys and cowgirls; Elephant (Nemo); Leaping greyhounds; Pony drill by Pitkins; Wiggins Family, tetterboard; Tex A. Schubach and wonder dog Rex; clown number; Second concert announcement; Capt. Sells (Swede Johnson) and his African lions.

The side show was managed by Bill Heath. The acts were Shuffling Sam's Georgia Minstrels; Miss Heath and her big snake; Heath and his magic; Mabel Johnson, sword mystery box; Marie Vanne and dancing girls and Marmalita, woman with mystery feet.

When the show played Benkleman, Nebraska on August 6 it was still using the Robbins name in two variations. A newspaper ad in the Joe Fleming collection carried the Famous Robbins title. The ad featured Capt. Wallace and his African lions. A reader [copy furnished to newspapers by the show's press agent] appeared in the *Benkleman Post and News Chronicle* was headed "Robbins Bros. Circus to show here August 6th." A photo showed Buck Steele, the western film star featured by the show, but the story was about the show's wild animal trainer who was identified as the youthful Allen Sells. The show's title in the text is Famous Robbins. Although at times the show did use advertising mats with the name "Capt. Sells" other times it was "Captain Wallace" as it was here. The trainer actually was Swede Johnson who back in the 1920s had been a Ringling-Barnum clown. The story of the imaginary "Allen Sells" (a moniker of course well known in circus history) is interesting to the extent it should remind circus historians to be extremely wary of these press department readers when researching history as this is pure fiction. Anyway, according to

this story, the youthful Allen Sells determined not to follow the life vocation his parents has selected for him. He always loved animals and trained several for his back yard circus as a child. He became a friend of a fellow school boy whose father was an executive of the Gollmar Bros. Circus and the two boys spent their vacations on that show. When young Sells graduated from high school and it was time to enter college and become the famous attorney his parents envisioned, he rebelled and went with the Gollmar Bros. show. When it was sold to the Robbins Circus he became affiliated with that show. While with Robbins he became a friend of the famous wild animal trainer Peter Taylor and acted as his personal aide and assistant. Then when Taylor was severely mauled by one of his lions, young Sells took over the job, and "today at age 24 he is the most daring and fearless of trainers in all circusdom." Anyway, you can't say the old press boys couldn't be interesting. Young Sells seemed to be a clone of Clyde Beatty, then touring with the huge forty car Cole Bros.-Clyde Beatty Circus.

After Montana it is possible the show followed a similar route to that of 1936. By October 4 the show was in Oakdale, Louisiana. It was now called World Bros. A reader in the Oakdale newspaper listed the acts as Buck Steele and his Oklahoma Wild West. Rex, the wonder dog; Capt. Sells, lion act; Williams Family of somersaulting tetter



Nemo being unloaded from his semi-trailer on World Bros. in 1938. Pfening Archives.

board acrobats; Worth Family of riders, featuring Buster, Nellie and Stella; Kate Smith dog act; Capt. Rhodes and his jungle pets; Donohue's trained stallions; the flying Maliettes and twenty clowns. Fletcher Smith was listed as the press agent. It is interesting to note that the illustration with the writeup showed five elephants.

Heron's show using the World Bros. title closed the 1937 season on October 20 at Andalusia, Alabama and then went into quarters at the Alexander City, Alabama fairgrounds.

The November 6, 1937 *Billboard* contained an advertisement that stated World Bros. Circus was for sale, although the title was not given. The ad read: "Truck circus for sale. Complete in every detail. 15 trucks and semi-trailers. Big top, side show tent, new set of double deck banners, 20 lengths, 10 high blues; 9 lengths, 8 high reserves. Cookhouse tent, complete kitchen with large ice box mounted on truck, 3 electric light plants. Elephant, lions, ring stock. Will sell whole outfit cheap for cash, or small down payment to reliable party. Quick sale necessary and a real bargain for an outfit ready for the road. Circus manager, P. O. Box 432, or care of Western Union, Alexander City, Alabama."

World Bros. band sleeper in 1938. Verne Perry's band is advertised on the side. Pfening Archives.



A week later the *Billboard* had a short bit which said that James M. Beach, general agent for World Bros. Circus, was in Macon, Georgia for the winter living at the Central Hotel. Other World Bros. troupers in Macon for the winter were Swede Johnson and Shorty Hinkle. There was no further information in the trade publication concerning the situation of Heron or his show until the early spring of 1938.

Heron did not sell the show but instead leased it to Rip Winkle for the 1938 season. Charles Donahue went along as treasurer to check on money and lease payments. Also joining were a number of other Heron people.

There was little or nothing in the trade publication about the show at the beginning of the season, only a few "want" ads which listed Rip Winkle as manager. The World Bros. title again would be used. Adkins and Terrell planned a new fifteen car show titled Robbins Bros that year.

For Rip Winkle to use the Robbins moniker on his new leased show might have complicated matters, although in 1931 there were indeed two Robbins titled shows on the road.

Little is known about World Bros. during the early part of the season. No opening review nor other stories appeared in the *Billboard*. It is assumed the show opened in April then began a more eastern route than the previous season. A newspaper advertisement for the show's stand in Buchannon, Virginia, April 29, 1938 listed the title as World Bros. Great Eastern Circus. The elephant was listed in the ad as Goliath, the largest on earth weighing a ton more than Jumbo. A reader for the Buchannon date listed Capt. Sells, the daring wild animal trainer and Jerry Burrell, a well known Hollywood wild west stunt man.

After the Jack Hoxie show folded in 1937 Roger Boyd went over to Barney Bros. Circus and then finished the season with Haag Bros. In early 1938 Boyd took the Franco Richards elephants to join Newton Bros. Later he went to World Bros.

It wasn't until August that the *Billboard* got around to giving some news about the World show. The August 13, 1938 issue reported that the show was in Ohio doing fair business. It was moving on a minimum of trucks to reduce overhead. The equipment was in good shape. George Meyers was directing the program and Jimmy Heron was doing the contracting and directing the advance crew. The article frankly admitted that the show

was struggling to keep going. Evidently Heron had agreed to come on the show to handle the routing during this the worst circus season of modern times.

A week later the August 20, 1938 *Billboard* gave further information on World Bros. The show in Ohio had recently played Alliance, Mansfield, Piqua and Wooster. Piqua had seen fair business but at Wooster there was virtually nothing due to rain. The article said the show was framed for small towns and all departments were being main

## BUCKHANNON

One Day Only  
FRIDAY, APR. 29

• AFTERNOON and NIGHT •

Showgrounds — Farnsworth Lot  
Auspices American Legion

For over sixty years  
America's greatest  
show

**WORLD BROS. CIRCUS**

GREAT EASTERN  
FROM THE LAND OF THE RANCH

**BARTON**

**Wild West**

presenting the  
Famous Western Screen Star  
**Jerry Burrell** in person  
with his cowboys, cowgirls, Indians and famous  
MOVING PICTURE HORSES  
DIRECT FROM HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA  
APPEARING IN PERSON EACH PERFORMANCE

**TARZAN** LARGEST ELEPHANT  
ON EARTH  
(WEIGHS A TON MORE THAN JUMBO)  
20 PERFORMING LIONS 20  
PERFORMING LEOPARDS, SEALIONS, CAMELS  
SEATS FOR 10,000 PEOPLE

PATRIOTIC SPECTACLE  
**Historic America**  
WITH  
PAUL REVERE, GEORGE WASHINGTON  
GEN. GRANT, BEN LEE, LINCOLN, ROOSEVELT  
SOLDIERS, COWBOYS AND INDIANS

—ADMISSION—

Adults 40c Children 25c

Newspaper ad used by World Bros. Circus in Buchannon, Virginia early in 1938. Roger Boyd collection.

tained with a minimum of personnel. So far it had been able to weather a bad season. Jimmy Heron had been laying out the route with much precaution. The advance billing forces were then under the direction of Elmer Jones, using two trucks, had been using a liberal amount of paper at all stands. However cheaper pictorial paper was being purchased from Neal Walters' U. S. Printing and

Engraving Company of Kansas City, Missouri. The posters were not real lithographs, but block color designs of rather poor quality.

Other information on World Bros. reported the show had a 110 foot round top with three 30s and seating exceeded 2,000. No menagerie was carried. Several cages and an elephant were exhibited in the side show. The staff included Rip Winkle, manager; Andy Kelly, assistant; Kokomo Anders, legal adjuster and Charles Donohue, treasurer.

Side show manager Chester Gregory's attractions were a Hawaiian show, Don Taylor, Carmicetta and Henry Smith's minstrels. Sam Moretta and Roger Boyd were on the ticket boxes.

Performers were listed as Charles Pond, Frank Sapiro, Swede Ring, Emma Sacco, Margie McCree, Tanamaraka Troupe, Joe Franklin, Barth and Meir, Esperanza troupe, Senior Murno and Capt. Sells. Clowns on the show were Joe Franklin, Tom Hubbard, Reno McCree and Swede Johnson. Oklahoma Inac and company of cowboys and cowgirls presented the aftershow. No further information on World Bros. appeared in the trade publication for the remainder of the year.

Roger Boyd says he was called to come on the show to handle Nemo. He recalls that when he had last been on the show in 1936 Nemo was still easy to handle, but had grown progressively difficult. When he arrived on the World show in 1938 he found Nemo securely tied down with leg chains and evidently was not being worked in the performance. Later in the season when the show was in the south in Arkansas or Mississippi Roger painfully recalls that Nemo attacked him and put him in the hospital with severe injuries. It was obvious the animal was dangerous and Heron soon sold him.

The exact day and date World Bros. closed is not known, but it was in the south probably not too far from Memphis, Tennessee since the show went into quarters there. The deal with Rip Winkle had not worked out due to the poor season so the tour was terminated and Heron took the show back. During the early weeks of 1939 while in Memphis quarters he decided not to tour the equipment again as a circus and proceeded to first dispose of the animals.

The February 11, 1939 *Billboard* said Heron had sold the remaining animals, horses, ponies, mule and a donkey to Barnard Bros. Circus owned by Buck Bernard and William Sells. A trailer to



Midway of World Bros. Circus during the 1938 season. Pfening Archives.

carry the animals went with the deal. Bernard had purchased the show's lion act and semi-trailer cage a few weeks before.

Roger Boyd says that Heron had sold Nemo to Neal Walters to settle a bill for advertising paper. The bill of sale in the Boyd collection read: "That I, James Heron, of the city of Memphis, County of Shelby, State of Tennessee, do hereby sell, transfer, assign, convey and deliver unto O. N. Walters of the City of Kansas City, County of Jackson,

This 1938 World poster is typical of those furnished to the show by Neil Walters' U. S. Printing and Engraving Co. Circus World Museum collection.



State of Missouri, that certain male elephant known as 'Nemo,' approximate weight of said elephant five thousand pounds, (5000#).

"To have and to hold unto O. N. Walters for the sum of Five Hundred Dollars (\$500.00), to be credited against the account of the World Bros. Circus and the Famous Robbins Circus with the U. S. Printing & Engraving Company of Kansas City, Missouri.

"I do hereby warrant that I am the owner of said elephant and will defend the title to same against all lawful claims thereto.

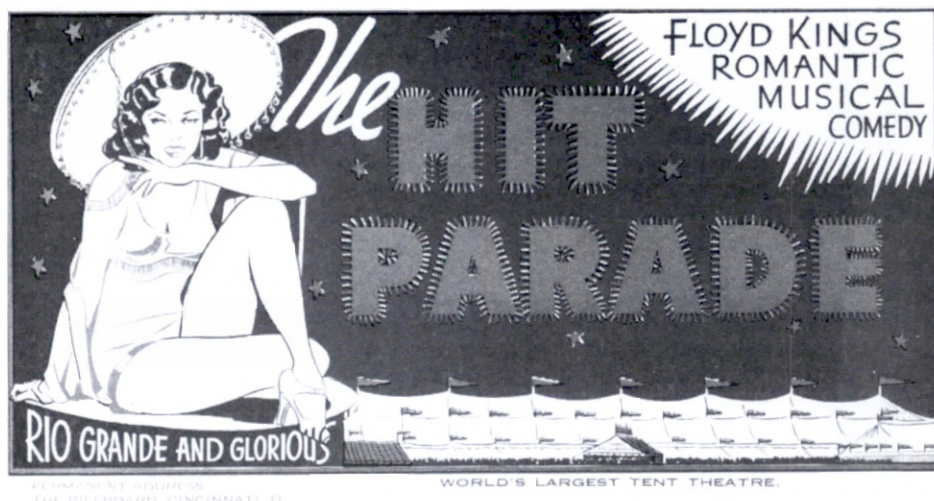
"In witness I have hereto set my hand this 6th day of March 1939. Signed (James Heron) and witnesses." And thus Nemo which Heron had purchased for \$2000 in 1931 was now gone for a fourth of the cost. Such is the fate of a once fine performing elephant that had "gone bad" and no longer was able to be handled safely.

Boyd reports that Neal Walters sold the elephant to Ben Davenport. Nemo was Davenport's first elephant. The Woodcock files list Nemo on Davenport's Dailey Bros. Circus from 1941 to 1947. Boyd says Nemo was executed at Chambersburg, Pennsylvania on June 12, 1947 when he could not be removed from a railroad car.

Heron had disposed of all of his animals and a few trucks, but the rest of the circus equipment was intact and stored in Memphis. The spring of 1939 and the opening of the circus season looked bleak with the smallest number of shows in many years scheduled to go out.

At this point Floyd King entered the Heron picture. King had served as general agent for the Adkins and Terrell shows since 1935. Both of their shows were now bankrupt, however a single twenty car Cole Bros. was salvaged and went on the road with Floyd King as general agent. However King would have another interest in outdoor show business for the 1939 season. He organized and was the motivating force behind a new canvas show called The Hit Parade which according to its letterhead was "a romantic musical comedy."

Quarters for The Hit Parade were established at the fairgrounds at Brownsville, Tennessee which was a short distance from Memphis. The *Billboard* reported King made a deal with Heron to furnish much of the equipment which had been on the 1938 World show, including trucks, light plants, cookhouse and no doubt some canvas, poles and seats. The show acquired new canvas, probably of the dramatic show type. A number of former Heron people went with the show includ-



ing Heron himself. According to Roger Boyd, Heron was general manager but remained in the background and was not mentioned in the trade publication. Charles Donahue went along as treasurer. The *Billboard* reported Roger Boyd was superintendent and was also doing the painting, a lifelong talent. Verne Perry, who had headed Heron circus bands for several years was bandleader.

The April 13, 1939 *Billboard* gave the first real information on the new Hit Parade show. It was noted it was being framed at Brownsville, Tennessee. Fred Yale had been named manager. Also arriving in quarters were Howard King, Floyd's brother, and his wife. King was lining up several national ads for banners. Clyde Mallory was general contracting agent and was to have a strong publicity campaign using a line of special pictorial paper, window cards, heralds and banners. The billing brigade was to have six men and four trucks. Other notes said the show was scheduled to open April 20 and would play daily stands giving a single evening performance. Toby Eastman and his wife were in charge of the show rehearsals.

There was considerable other news about the new show in the *Billboard* both before and for several weeks after the opening. It was mentioned that Verne Perry would have fourteen men in the band. An interesting item reported that Renee, bubble dancer, and La Fanette, fan specialist, would be featured in the concert. Evidently the gentlemen in the audience would be treated, for an additional fee, to certain specialty dances in the after show. A final note stated that the Hit Parade would have eighty people with it. James Taulbee was to be superintendent of concessions; Howard King was listed as commercial advertising manager; and Frances Parks was staging the chorus numbers.

The *Billboard* covered the initial performance at Brownsville on April

Letterhead used by Floyd King's Hit Parade show in 1939. Like many King letterheads it is printed on pink paper. Pfening Archives.

29. The reviewer said the show had a new canvas tent. The performance featured a ventriloquist, comic, comedienne, magician, dancers, Mexican musical artists, the Hit Parade Quartet, the hillbilly Ozark Ramblers and a chorus line. The staff was listed as Fred Yale, manager; Charles Donahue, treasurer; Roger Boyd, painter; Calvin Spikes, boss canvasman; Clyde Mallory, contracting agent; James Taulbee, superintendent concessions; Richard Jones, electrician; Marjorie King, tickets; Joseph Krupa, superintendent of cookhouse and Marie Vann, prima donna.

The route moved the show through Tennessee and later Kentucky where members of the Richards Bros. Circus visited at Bardstown on April 30. Later the show played Ohio and western Pennsylvania. Floyd King served as general agent routing the show as well as performing his duties on Cole Bros.

World Bros. billstand in Elmira, New York for July 20, 1938 date. Dunwoody collection.

The Hit Parade show lasted but a single season and Heron retrieved his equipment. The 1939 season was also the final one for Floyd King with Cole Bros. In 1940 King came out with a new type show. It was a so-called free circus and used the title Robbins Bros. A notice in the *Billboard* covered the show's stand at Clay Center, Kansas, June 6, 1940 and gave a brief description of its operation. The show was sponsored by local businessmen as a good-will gesture. There was no admission charged. The merchants paid a flat price for the circus which was presented in an open area. The performance included among other acts the Billetti highwire troupe and Sparky the educated elephant. Three shows were given in Clay Center. Roger Boyd advises that James Heron had no connection with Floyd King's 1940 effort.

Heron remained active in outdoor show business for another decade although he had no further interest in circuses. For a season or so in the early 1940s he was with Dodson World's Fair Shows, a large railroad carnival. He later framed and operated wild life exhibits which were very popular at the time. They consisted of around twenty small cages of animals such as foxes, racoons and small deer.

The shows were booked on carnivals or exhibited independently at fairs. Some of the shows had a small entrance fee but most had a free gate and a "ding box" at the exit where a suggested donation of twenty-five cents would be requested. The wild life shows were a walk-through type housed in a small tent with an outside entrance banner. A number of prominent showmen, including Floyd King, operated such shows in the 1940s.

Heron continued with wild life shows until his retirement, thus ending his active days the way he began, operating small animal shows. He died in the early 1960s.

The author is especially appreciative for the help given in the preparation of this article by Roger Boyd, also Bill Elbirn, Don Marcks, Joe Fleming, Jim Dunwoody, Fred D. Pfening, Jr. and the Circus World Museum.



# CARLA WALLENDAL

## 50 Years on the Highwire

By Debbie Wallenda

**A**fter 50 years of service to a job, most people are ready to retire to the quiet life with little responsibility and worry. However, in her 50th year on the highwire, Carla Wallenda is still going strong both on the highwire and on her 110 foot high sway pole.

Carla, 53, is the only child of Karl and Helen Wallenda and was three years old when she made her first professional appearance on the highwire in 1939 in a short film titled *High Wire Lay Off*, starring Lou Jacobs and Little Carla Wallenda.

Although she has no recollection of learning to walk the wire she says she must have learned something from her mother who topped the three-high pyramid until she was eight months pregnant.

"I am more natural in the air than I am on the ground. I'm a complete klutz!," she laughed. "The only serious broken bones I had are when I broke my ankle in three places tripping over a log."

Admittedly a "Daddy's girl," Carla did more tricks on the highwire than anyone, except her father. The only things he did that she did not are handstand tricks and sky

Carla Wallenda, with her father Karl, learning to walk the wire at eight years of age. Pfening Archives.

walks. The latter, she says, is not out of the question yet.

"Doing dishes, cooking, housework, I was belligerent, I didn't care about those things," she said. "I wanted to be out there setting up and tearing down. Women were not really into that, so Uncle Herman [Wallenda] would tell me 'Go get the dead man.' There I was 14 years old, 75 pounds and dragging this dead man (anchor) all the way across the football field and when I got there, they told me it had to go back to the other side. Just to discourage me, they did not want me out there."

"Another time I remember we were loading up the rigging truck and the men were picking up the rigging bags and throwing them into the truck. All of a sudden they picked me up and threw me into the truck too. They gave me a very hard time about being out there and setting up and tearing down. . . . I don't regret it because I did learn a lot and it helped me later in my life."

"My mother did not want me to work in the circus. She kept putting me in private schools. By the time I was 14 or 15 years old, I told Vati (Karl) 'I can't take this anymore. Either you take me on the road or I'll run away and join the circus!'"

"He said 'Okay I'll make a deal with you, either you stay in school, or, do the head

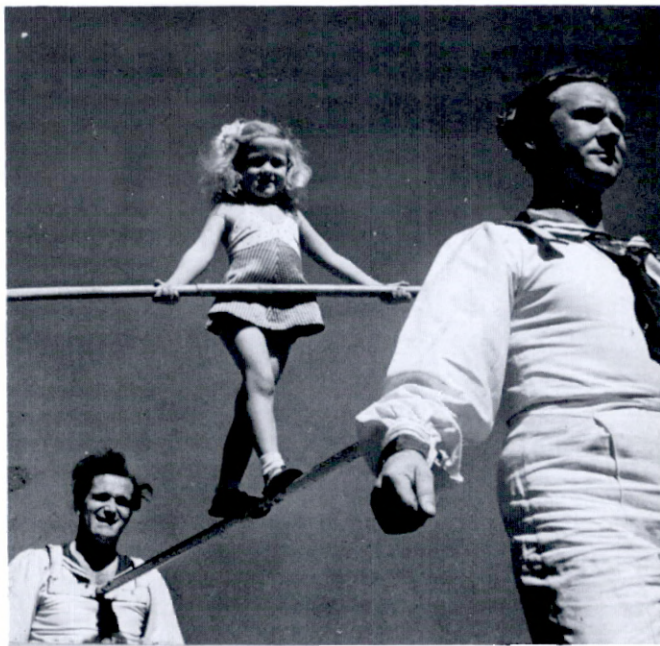
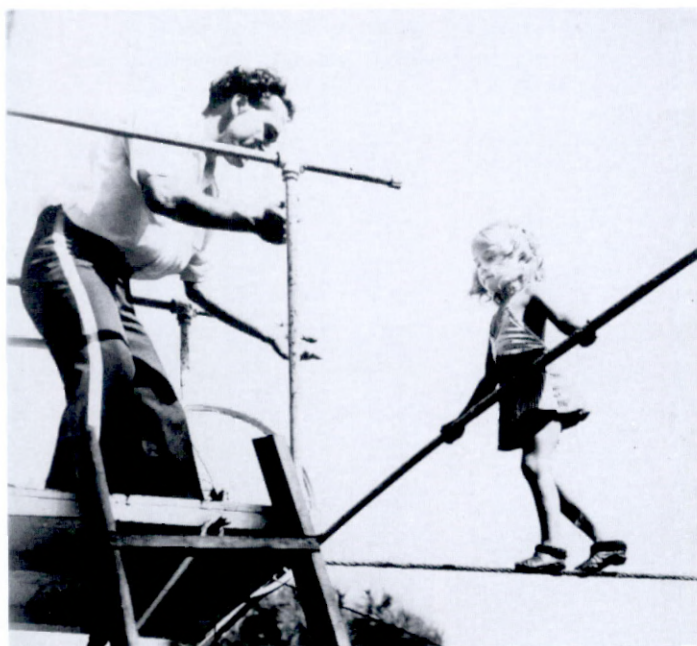
stand on the shoulder bar on the bicycle pyramid before we leave in three weeks,'" she said. "I had never tried a head stand before. I would come home from school, there went the school books and home work and I stood on my head, everyday. In three weeks, I was doing the trick. My father never backed down on his word and I got to go on the road."

"Our first date was Cleveland and on opening day I did a beautiful head stand. Second day I went to do the trick. I put my head on the bar, my behind in the air and went to put my feet up, and they wouldn't go. The guys said 'Stand up,' I couldn't get up. I had to go into the platform like that. The other performers all teased me, I was very embarrassed," she laughed.

Though Carla topped many of her father's pyramids, including the seven-person-pyramid, she also topped the three-high on bicycles.

"That was probably the hardest thing I have ever done. The secret is not to breathe the whole time!," she laughed. "I didn't do it very often, it was always a spur of the moment thing."

Karl Wallenda, left, and Joe Geiger with Carla on the bar in 1942. Pfening Archives.



"The first time was in Mexico City with Atayde, I was 22, and one night all the Ringling show was visiting and we were on the wire when one of the guys in the act panicked in one of the smaller pyramids. We got out there and he started waving the pole screaming 'I'm going to fall!' I was standing on top of him and believe me, I'm not one to cuss," she said. "But you heard truck driver language coming out of my mouth! I told him to stand up straight and get me to that platform. I must have shocked him because he did, and he went straight down the ladder and never stepped foot on a wire again."

"Anyway, there we were without enough people for the seven. So, daddy says to Uncle Herman 'Do you want to do the three high? Uncle Herman said 'Sure,' I said 'Okay, where's my mother?' She was in the apartment cooking dinner. I did it, cold turkey. I had practiced it for four or five years, but had never done it in the show. Sometimes that's the best way to do something, you don't have time to get nervous about it."

Carla topped her father's seven-person pyramid for eleven years, with seventeen different understudies. She recalled a time when her father's act carried a semi-trailer and five trucks with house trailers down the road. "No one could ever start trouble with us because we always out numbered them," she laughed.

Carla standing on Karl's shoulders in the bicycle trick in the 1940s. Wallenda Family collection.



Carla topping the seven pyramid. Arthur Grotefent, Gunther Wallenda, Joe Seitz and Johnny Manko are on the wire. Herman and Karl are on the second level. Wallenda Family collection.

She recalled a time on the Beatty show when they were in rehearsals in California. "We were in rehearsals from 9 until 4 everyday and it really got boring. So everybody got themselves sling shots. We would run up the mountains and have wars. My father was producing the carousel production number and he needed all the boys for the number. He ran out of the big top and yelled 'Where are you boys, I need you.' Norbert Kreisch, one of the boys in the act, stood up on the side of the mountain and said 'Watch me hit him in the forehead.' The next thing we saw was my father holding his head, stumbling around, looking for a grassy spot to fall on. He wouldn't fall on the dirt."

"Another time on the Beatty show, we were in rehearsals and Clyde Beatty was going broke. He had this beautiful Palomino liberty horse act and was feeding these animals to his cats. There was one beautiful horse that we all loved. We didn't like the mangy horses being fed to the cats either, but there was one we just loved. Even the butcher was leaving this one horse until last.

"We had already eyeballed a nice pasture about ten miles away and in California, and the Wallendas turned into horse thieves. We went to the winter quarters and stole this horse. Joe Seitz had a car and we threw a rope around the horse, tied it to the car and went ten miles on the interstate with the horse. The guys all took turns jumping out and running next to the horse until we got to the pasture. We had to bust

the padlock on the gate to get the horse in.

"The next day, Clyde Beatty was mad. My father was glad the horse got stolen because he was attached to it too. Clyde Beatty put up a \$500 reward for anyone who knew who the horse thieves were. I knew my father knew we did it, but he was as glad as we were that the horse was gone."

Carla worked in her father's act until 1961 when she, her husband Paul Jordan, and John and Patsy Jordan had taken their own highwire act on the road. It was during this time that the seven col-

lapsed in Detroit in 1962. Carla said she was first mistakenly told that all seven members of the trick had fallen.

"I thought the cable broke," she said. "I did that trick for eleven years, and they did it for three years before me. I believed they couldn't fall--not all of them."

When she found out exactly what had happened she said called her father and told him she and the Jordans were on their way to help.

She said, "Daddy said he didn't want us there. We wanted to go and do something, but he wanted to do it himself."

In 1963, Carla's act, with Paul and Chico Guzman, was touring with the Beatty show when her father was recreating the seven. Carla said the Beatty show was in Florida after working the night show, she would

Publicity photo of Carla taken in the 1950s. Wallenda Family collection.



drive back to Sarasota every night so she could be there for rehearsals in the morning. She had to miss weekend practice because of early show times with Beatty, and it was on a weekend when the seven collapsed again in practice.

"I found out from a reporter," she said. "He asked me how badly members of my family were injured when they fell while rehearsing the seven person pyramid. There was forty minutes until show time, and there were no phones on the lot. I went bananas. When I finally did reach my father, he was in a state of shock. He told me Gunther was hurt. I told him I could bring Chico in. Daddy said 'We have five more days of practice Carla, and anyone that hasn't held the seven, I don't want to go with them.' I reminded him that Chico did the seven with us, but he couldn't remember."

Carla returned home the next day with Chico and a picture of him doing the seven with the Wallendas. They practiced with him and together they all went to Fort Worth. In an effort to prepare everyone for the show, the troupe went up on the wire for another practice. As soon as the pyramid reached mid-way, all the lights in the arena went out.

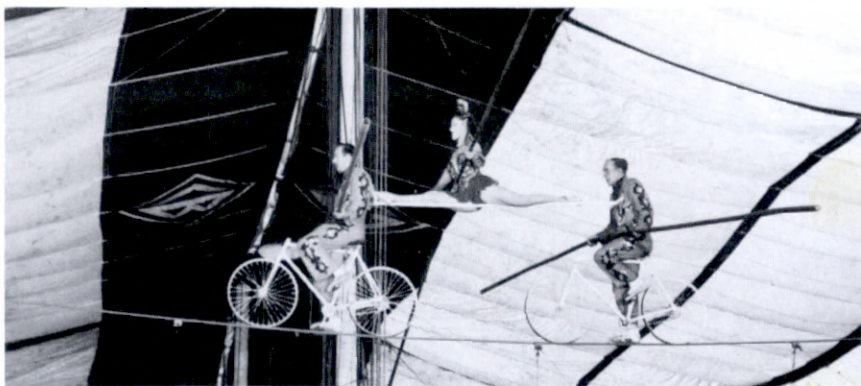
"When the lights went out, I was paralyzed. It was maybe a few seconds, but it seemed like a lifetime. When they came back on I could see they were all still there. Then the guys sort of got superstitious, and Jenny [Wallenda] was never able to stand up on the pyramid because the guys would get out of step and Uncle Herman would tell them to walk across without stopping. Whenever anyone stood up it was me.

"For about three straight days only I was doing the trick. Jenny and I knew that it was not good for these guys to be so superstitious. One show we schemed and reversed our verbal signals so the understanders, who couldn't see who was on top, thought that I was there when it was actually Jenny. Everything went fine then," she said.

After that Karl presented a small troupe as did Carla. In 1966 she began performing atop the 110 foot high sway pole that had belonged to her Aunt Yetty Wallenda. Yetty had died in 1963 when she fell from the pole in Omaha, Nebraska.

"I always admired Yetty," Carla said. "She always joked that I took her off the seven, and I'd never get the high pole until she was dead."

She said Yetty often brought a pot of "soup" over to Carla in the late afternoons. One day however, Yetty's husband Arthur was working in the shop when Yetty



Carla doing the bicycle trick while the Wallenda act was on the Clyde Beatty Circus in the 1950s. Wallenda Family collection.

walked by with a pot of her special soup for Carla. Arthur stopped Yetty to see what was in the pot and found two martinis, Calra said.

In 1966 she married Chico Guzman and they continued with their own highwire act, the sway pole and a hanging perch act. In 1972 she said she experienced her first real tragedy. Chico fell to his death while attempting to assist Karl down from a skywalk in Wheeling, West Virginia.

"My father always taught me that the show comes first," she explained. "Chico died on Friday and on Saturday we had two shows. In the morning I had to make the arrangements at the funeral parlor. The other performers wanted to take my rigging down and that's when I went hysterical. I wanted to do my pole. They had to take my perch rigging down because I couldn't do it without Chico."

"My father came to my defense, he told them to leave me alone, 'If she wants to work, let her work,' he said."

Yetty Wallenda standing by the sway pole now being used by Carla. Pfening Archives.



After Chico's death she continued to present her sway pole. She was working in Sarasota in 1978 when news of her father's death came.

"I always thought my father was invincible. My daughter Rietta, who was there with my father, told me and I was in shock. I made arrangements to go to Puerto Rico, but first

called Ricky [eldest son] in Germany, and Mario [second son] in Iowa, to give them the news.

"San Juan is a large town," she said. "They had about 2,200 taxi cabs there, and there we were, myself, Jenny and Patsy. Jenny asked the cab driver if we were going past the place where Karl fell. The driver replied, 'Strange you should say that. Do you know that only yesterday I had Karl Wallenda and his pretty granddaughter in my cab. He told me that he had a daughter at home in Florida who did an act on a pole that was much more dangerous than anything he did.'

"Out of 2,200 cabs to get the very cab driver that had driven my father and Rietta the day before. And he didn't know us from Adam, he didn't know we were Wallendas."

In fifty years, Carla has known both triumph and tragedy, personally and publicly. She has raised four children and is now the grandmother of five granddaughters. She says every wrinkle on her face is there because of one thing or another that has happened to her children.

She has done any number of different acts including iron jaw, cradle, a flying act, ladders and a riding act in addition to the high wire, the sway pole and her perch act. She even did elephants, she laughed.

"I was never too good with elephants, in fact I am afraid of them. . . . Elephants and airplanes scare me. I'll fly," she said. "I'll be a lady about it. I've even learned to do it sober. But I don't like it. I'd rather drive my truck."

"My career has had its ups and downs. But in all I think my life has been very rewarding. . . . The places I've gotten to go, the people I've gotten to meet," she said.

"One of the biggest thrills I had was back when we were doing the seven on Atayde. It was the only time in my life that I had nine curtain calls. I had never even had a curtain call in my life, any place. A big part of doing what I do is a love for being in front of an audience. But just as much, I just can't stand being in one place. I love to travel. Even a ten day fair is too long."

"I want to keep doing my pole as long as I can climb up it. Maybe," she laughed, "Maybe then they can winch me up."

# HERBERT'S HORSES

## Part Three

### BY DOROTHY HERBERT

#### CHAPTER 40 SIXTY FOUR HORSES

**S**am Gumpertz continued to seek new or rehased ideas for acts for the big show. Either he or an associate had been digging through old circus programs and posters looking for acts that had been presented in the past. The idea of a big horse tableau came from an 1896 Barnum & Bailey lithograph. This bill showed 50 horses in the ring at once.

During the winter of 1936-1937 a number of animal trainers, four girls and myself assembled in the ring barn and the training began. A huge revolving table was placed in the center of the ring on which stood the largest of the show's elephants. I was seated on its head, the trainer standing at its side.

Four camels with the other girls were placed on four other pedestals. Ten liberty horses were turned loose and circled the elephant tub. A concealed trainer kept them in line. Two ten horse liberty horse acts were then brought into circle in the opposite direction. In addition a number of ponies entered the ring. They ran the other way on the ring curb. At this point the elephant trainer cued the elephant to stand up on its hind legs. Meanwhile I stood on the elephant's head and waved a long lash whip in the air--

merely for affect. The table would turn and different colored lights would shine on the number.

The act worked out well and was ready in time for the trip to New York for the opening of the 1937 season at Madison Square Garden. A beautiful outfit was ordered for me from Brooks Costume Company.

A little comedy was connected with this number at the dress rehearsal in winter quarters. Unbeknown to anyone Mr. Gumpertz had ordered dummies dressed in the same attire as military riding maids including one on the end dressed as I was wearing a blond wig and riding side saddle.

All very cute. Only the ponies started running around the ring curb all of the dummies started to fall apart. Arms and legs when every which way and many of the heads fell off.

Of course all of us laughed so hard the number could not continue. Luckily this was only a dress rehearsal. By the opening all of this had been repaired.

The act turned out to be nothing more than a big production number like a spec. I was no more than a prop in the act and I was no longer interested in it.

Dorothy Herbert in the sixty-four horse tableau display during the 1937 Ringling-Barnum season. Pfening Archives.

However at the last minute prior to the opening of the season my part in the act was given to another person.

In 1935 Mr. Gumpertz hired Maria Rasputin, daughter of Russia's Mad Monk Rasputin. The Ringling management had no idea what they were going to do with her. She was placed on the Hagenbeck-Wallace-Forepaugh-Sells show that season. It was decided to put Madam Rasputin in a wild animal act on that show. This had not worked out too well as she was mauled on one occasion and the act finally fell apart. She was still under contract in 1937 and Gumpertz was trying to find a way to use her on the Ringling show.

Pat Valdo called me to his office and said, "Dorothy you seem to always be having ideas, maybe you can think of something for Marie Rasputin." I at once came up with a suggestion. Rudy Rudynoff and his wife had joined the show. The Rudynoffs had two Great Dane dogs. I said why not let Marie stand on the table with the those dogs and a whip and let her direct the horse tableau number. It solved the problem of how to present her and it got me out of an act that no longer appealed to me.

The act was display 16 in the program. It was listed as "beautiful troupes of performing liberty horses and ponies, presented simultaneously in all rings and stages by their trainers. In the center ring Rudy Rudynoff, ring one Adolph Delbosq, ring three Gordon Orton, stage one Rudy Rudynoff, Jr and stage two Paul Horompo. Concluding with Mademoiselle Marie Rasputin presenting in the center ring the most gigantic and spectacular equine assemblage in circus history, introducing sixty free-running thoroughbreds racing in concentric circles around a towering pedestal on which is mounted Mlle. Rasputin, while a flying column of tiny ponies gallop on the narrow ring curb encompassing the whole of this ineffably beautiful tableau."

It was indeed a rather impressive display with all of the show's liberty horse acts coming into the center ring after their usual numbers.

The act went over big in the Garden. The house lights were turned off and the spot lights were turned on as the table in the center revolved. In New York and at first on the road the number was a success. Then the show began to hit bad lots and the weight of the elephant would cause the table to sink into soft ground. In order for the elephant tub to turn two men were beneath it turning



cranks and they were in danger of being hurt. The act was revised. A horse on a smaller table replaced the elephant but the effect was the same.

In mid-season some problem came up and Marie was removed from the act. I was called back to work the act. On the horse I could not wear the beautiful long costume that had originally been made for me to use on the elephant. I wore the the Indian costume that had been made for the ill-fated vaultage act that had been scratched.

Marie was listed and pictured in the program and I am sure the audience wondered what was going on when I appeared in her place as I had been introduced earlier in the program. Marie's removal from the act concluded her circus career.

#### CHAPTER 41 THE AWAKENING

The show was, once more, about to close. Always before I had felt a little sad as the season came to an end, now I was anxious to get back home to my teaching and to work on my own horses. Also, I was up tight about something that had happened with Nugget. As I have explained before, in order to get the most out of a dressage horse it is necessary to ride him astride and cue him with the bit and spur. Because I had several other horses for sidesaddle at my disposal, we had broken Nugget for astride only, and he was an outstanding mount. I was very proud of him.

The show had brought over from Europe a German horse trainer and his horse, which was supposed to be one of the best horses from the Royal Stables in Holland. The trainer was a big, rather surly man, and he worked his horse hard. It wasn't long before it became lame. The show was insistent that he appear in the high school number, and they told him to select another horse to ride. He would settle for none other than Nugget, stating that he was the only horse on the show who would do him justice. Mr. Valdo asked if I would consent and, although I resented the idea with my whole being, I remembered the time when I did not have a horse to ride when I first joined the show, so I consented.

I went back to riding Lindy until the man's horse was well again, but from then on he continued to ride Nugget whenever it suited his fancy. I never knew which horse would await me when I went to the back door. I boiled, but said nothing. Without Tex there to intercede for me and back me up, I was at a loss.

True, Rudynoff continued to help me with the Big Hitch and with Satan's jump over the two horses, with me blindfolded and everyone entered into the wild horse jump by standing around and cracking whips; but, as far as the high school act, I was once more on my own.

With two people riding him Nugget became confused. I was anxious to get him home and straighten him out. Will Rogers once said, "I never met a man I didn't like." I did!

We had been hearing rumors for weeks that the show was changing hands, now it was being verified. One day Mr. Gumpertz sent word for me to come to his private railroad car after the night show. No one was there but him and his wife. He told me that they were leaving, the new people were taking over right away.

Then he told me what I had suspected for a long time--that I was worth a great deal more than I was being paid. The show had all different kinds of lithographs out on me and I



Dorothy Herbert in her Indian costume during the 1937 Ringling-Barnum season. Pfening Archives

was appearing in the show eight times; I was a valuable property. I asked him, then, why this had not come to anyone's attention long before this?

"I must admit," he confessed, "our motive was a purely selfish one. Our intention was to keep you ever striving to reach greater heights. Given too much, too soon, we feared that you might become complacent and be satisfied to sit back and rest on your laurels."

While this, maybe, explained a lot of things, it didn't make me feel any better. He then advised me to say nothing at the moment, but to go home and wait until they contacted me in regard to the coming season. Naturally, they were expecting me back--where else was there for me to go?

As usual, they were sending their baggage stock to Peru, Indiana for the winter because they could feed them much cheaper there

than in Florida. I contacted the new owners and asked if I might put my horses on the train that was going to Peru. From there I could hire a trailer and take them home. They said it would be all right.

There was no trouble about Rex, but when I claimed Nugget, I was informed that he belonged to the show and would remain in winter quarters. It was then pointed out that I called all of the horses that I rode "my horse." Rattlesnake Bill, the ring stock boss at the time, and the only one to witness my handing over the money when I bought the horse, had caught pneumonia while we were in the Garden and had passed away. Tex, of course, knew the horse belonged to me, but he was no longer with the show; nor was the veterinarian who we had at that time.

I tried every way I could to contact the people from whom I had bought the horse, but they had moved away and four years had now passed. I could not trace them.

My only argument was why on earth would I have spent the whole winter in Florida, at my own expense, given up playing the indoor shows, go to the winter quarters every day and work on a horse, if he were not my own? It had cost me quite a lot of money. No one bothered to listen to what I had to say.

It was now time for the train to leave for Peru. I saw that Rex was loaded and that Jimmy had plenty of food for the trip. I kissed Satan and Nugget goodbye and went home. I later took the trailer, drove to Peru, picked up Jimmy and Rex, and started my riding school again.

Ironically, years later, when it no longer mattered, I happened to be going through some of Mother's papers and among them I found the registration papers, in my name, for Nugget; they had been sent to my home in Scottsburg, Indiana.

#### CHAPTER 42 I CRY MY HEART OUT

One of the pupils in my riding school had bought a horse which was a real handful. After he had thrown her a few times she refused to have anything to do with him. He was a lovely, bay gelding with a black mane and tail. I bought him from her and trained him for high school. Because he was a gaited horse, my teaching job was a little easier; he had good action to start with. I thought it was about time that I had a letterhead made and one of the photos on it was of my new high school horse, Commander. That was to be his only publicity ever. About this same time I broke Rex to do the waltz and rear.

Before going to the indoor shows, I drove over to Rochester, Indiana, to visit the Cole

Bros. Circus to see if there might be anyone there that I knew. Zack Terrell and Jess Adkins had teamed up as partners. Clyde Beatty and Ken Maynard, the movie star, were the big features; and Zack and Jess set about to convince me that I could be one, too, if I would just join up with them. I told them that I would think it over. Now that I had my own horses, there were several other things that I had in mind and I did not wish to commit myself just then.

The first Shrine indoor show that year was in Chicago. When we arrived at the building, Jimmy found a nice corner for my horses and, after watering and feeding them and seeing that they had plenty of bedding, Jimmy went out to eat.

An innovation that year was to be a wild west concert, and while Jimmy was out to dinner, the cowboys and their stock arrived. One of them tied a bucking horse next to Commander, and he got excited about something and started kicking and hit Commander full force on his hind leg. Commander never got back up after he fell.

I was upstairs in the dressing room when the ring stock boss came and told me that my horse had a broken leg—I did not go to see, but I heard the shot. I went all to pieces.

Was I never to have a high school horse of my own to ride? It seemed that I was doomed to lose every one that I got. First Dexter, who, through no fault of my own, I had been obliged to get rid of; then the Count De Graceland, who caught cold in New York and died; and, last, but not least, I had not yet gotten over my failure to prove ownership of my beloved Nugget.

Now, once again, my horse had been taken from me. I cried my heart out. No one could say anything to make the hurt less. Of course, they provided one of the show's horses for me to ride and I finished the dates. Each night I cried myself to sleep and refused to talk to almost everyone.

From Chicago we went to Cleveland; then we had a week's layoff before the next date. I went back to Rochester to talk to Mr. Adkins and Mr. Terrell. The offer they had for me was very attractive, and I was still bitter about my parting with the Ringling Bros. Circus. Now, without a high school horse of my own, any other plans I may have had were shot.

I told them that I would think about their offer and let them know as soon as the winter dates were over; but they said that they would have to have an answer right away on account of publicity, programs, lithographs, etc. To cinch the deal, they took me to the ring barn and showed me a beautiful black stallion, Black Hawk. The trainer put him



Dorothy's fire jump was shown on this Ringling litho first used during the 1937 season. Pfening Archives.

through his paces, then they had the trainer bring out a big sorrel rearing horse.

Jorgen Christiansen, the head horse trainer, assured me that he would have a Big Hitch ready by the time I got back from the indoor shows, and I joined them in Chicago for their opening.

The first that the Ringling Bros. Circus heard about the change was when they read about it the following week in the showman's newspaper *Billboard*.

#### CHAPTER 43 COLE BROS. CIRCUS

Pat Valdo called me in Detroit at the Shrine Circus and told me that I was still under contract with the Ringling Brothers Circus for the coming season. I told him I was sure that he was mistaken.

Pat told me I was being childish and did not realize the enormity of what I had done. It was childish, I suppose, but they had made me so by treating me like one. Nevertheless, I knew that I was wrong; I should have given them a chance to present their side of the story before running off half-cocked.

First one and then another of the office staff called. I explained to them that no one had asked me to come back, nor had I heard from them, other than a Christmas card. They argued that it was a foregone conclusion that I would be back, no one had ever thought otherwise; besides, I was still under contract to them and not at liberty to go elsewhere.

When I pointed out that the three year contract which I had signed had expired, it was hastily dug out of the files. They were under the impression that it had been for five years, not three. They still had an awful lot of lithographs of me, and these would now have to be put on the shelf.

Upon joining the Cole Bros. Circus in Chicago, I found that, true to his word,

Jorgen Christiansen had put together not a ten horse hitch, but sixteen using his palomino liberty horses for the number. He had done an excellent job.

When I reported to him for rehearsal, I found that one of his handlers for an end ring had quit just as they were leaving winter quarters, and he had no one to work that liberty horse act. He was more concerned over that than anything else at the moment. I offered to step in and work the act if something could be found in the wardrobe department for me to wear. He was very pleased and ordered

the act brought in at once so that he could teach me the cues.

Black Hawk was well trained and made a good showing. Their rearing horse, though nothing like the great Troubadour, was good, and would improve. I, of course, had my own jumper Rex.

I had left Rex at home during the last two indoor shows, as they had not had a jumping horse number. Zack Terrell had sent a truck to my barn in Scottsburg and picked Rex up and took him to winter quarters, then on to Chicago in their train. When they came to pick Rex up, Mother had pointed out to them what a great rearing pony Barney was, and had them take him along; they had already made a place for him in the show. The wardrobe department had fixed up an outfit for him. He wore a bonnet, jumped through a paper covered hoop, and came out

This unusual photo of Dorothy and three rearing horses was taken on the Ringling show in 1937. Pfening Archives.





This photo of Dorothy Herbert on Lindy appeared in the 1938 Chicago Stadium program of the Cole Bros. Circus. Author's collection.

wearing a dress; then he would walk down the track on his hind legs. They called it, "Aunt Jamima Goes To The Circus." In the Chicago Stadium the show went over big and everyone was sure it was going to be a winner. Then we went on the road. It was rainy every day with small crowds and this went on and on. They were unable to pay anyone's salary, but most of us were trying to stick it out. A few of the acts did leave.

In the meantime, I was taking a lot of bad falls due to the muddy, slippery lots. The rearing horse fell down on me several times, and Rex would often slide and knock the hurdle down, or slip as he landed on the other side. But the Big Hitch was the worst. Very often one of the horses would go down, usually to scramble back up, but, when this happened, I would go from my feet to astride one of the horses on which I was standing. This was not a very desirable position because your legs would then take a beating from the harness as the horses bumped into each other.

It was at this point that Mr. Terrell and Mr. Adkins called for me to come to their private car for a talk. They explained the situation to me: they were not only broke, but going deeper in debt all the time. They felt badly because they had lured me away from Ringling Bros. Circus. It was also evident that I was taking a lot of punishment on account of the lousy tracks, and they did not feel that they could continue to ask me to take those kind of chances, without pay, any longer. No one was ever

more thoughtful or kinder. They suggested that I take the beautiful stallion that I was riding, Black Hawk, and that with him and Rex I would be able to play fairs and still do all right. They made out a Bill of Sale on Black Hawk; then they somehow managed to rake together the five weeks' salary due me.

I sent home for a trailer and when it arrived there was no room for Barney, so I left him with the show. They featured him for many years in his Aunt Jamima walk around.

#### CHAPTER 44 HORSE SHOWS

I went back home and to my old standby of teaching other people and their horses. I was once more making money, but I no longer enjoyed doing it. It upset me that, after working with a horse to get it perfect in its gaits, the rider would get nervous when in front of a crowd, convey this to the animal, and not have it respond properly.

I recall one time when I went with one of my pupils to an important horse show. Her husband had spent a great deal of money for her horse and I, in turn, had spent a lot of time on the horse and also on the rider. The horse was everything that could be desired; I can't say the same for the rider.

Before the show I took the horse into the exercise ring to limber him up. Several men were standing on the outside and I heard them remark about what a fine mount he was. When the class that my horse was entered in came into the ring, the owner became excited and miscued him several times. With the best horse in this class under her, she came out a poor third.

As we were loading up to go home, one of the men who had admired the horse earlier came up and said, "Next time, why don't you let this young lady show your horse? He ought to have won first place."

"Oh, winning isn't important," she replied, "you see, the man that I am married to has

This twenty-four sheet Chicago billing featured the special paper the Cole show had printed for Dorothy Herbert in 1938. Pfening Archives.



lots of money but we don't know any important people; and I figure since mostly society folks come to these things I will get to meet some."

Of course none of this was any of my business as long as she was paying me for the job I was doing.

#### CHAPTER 45 KING KONG

Meanwhile, the Cole Brothers Circus had closed and was back in Rochester. I had heard that they were badly in need of money and were selling some of their stock. I phoned them and asked if the rearing horse, King Kong, was among those to be disposed of. They told me that if he were not they would see to it that he was. Ever my friends, Mr. Terrell and Mr. Adkins saw to it that I got my horse for a fair price. With the three horses that I now had I was in good shape to go to work.

The year was 1939 and I had booked myself to play the Deutschlandhalle in Berlin, Germany. They had contacted me before but now, for the first time, I had my own horses and could accept the offer. It was quite an honor because it was the first time that they had ever invited an American equestrian of my type to appear in their country.

In order to present my acts, it would be necessary for them to build a track for me to work on, as they just used a ring normally. Quite a few letters were exchanged in regard to just what would be needed. When all of the arrangements were just about complete, I was warned by just about everyone not to go. I wanted to go very badly, but for once I listened. Mother and I just happened to be listening to the radio the night that the news came over it that the Deutschlandhalle in Berlin had just been bombed.

#### CHAPTER 46 RINGLING'S, THE SECOND TIME AROUND

Now that I had my three horses, it was time that I put them to work. True, I would have to buy a truck to transport them, but I had a little money put aside from my teaching, and was in pretty good shape. I contacted George Hamid, the agent who had booked Dexter and me into Canada and he said he would be happy to handle my acts. The first show he booked was the Police Circus in St. Louis, Missouri, and he forwarded the contracts, which I signed. More would follow. It was at this time that my mother began having heart trouble. It was necessary to send her to Cincinnati, Ohio, for treatments. This took quite a

bit of money, and I found that I would no longer be able to finance the truck for the horses.

Meanwhile, Pat Valdo had called me several times from Florida. I had been so wrapped up in my new plans I am afraid I did not listen too well; now that the wind had been taken out of my sails, it was a different story. The next time Pat called I was more amenable. He told me that the North brothers, who were now in control of the Ringling Brothers Circus, would like to talk to me in person because, over the phone, we seemed to get nowhere. Would I consider coming to Sarasota for a get-together? I agreed, packed my bags, put them in the car, and started out. At that time we did not have all the nice freeways nor the high-powered cars that we have today.

I made the trip there without incident. After checking into the hotel, I called Pat Valdo to let him know I had arrived and would be available the next day. I washed my hair and was in the tub when the phone rang. It was Pat and the North boys; would I please come down to the lobby. I explained my situation, as I dripped water all over the floor, and asked if we couldn't wait until morning. No. They had to talk right now. So, with a towel wrapped around my head and looking far from glamorous, I went down.

It did not take long for us to get our differences ironed out and they had a contract with them for me to sign. "There is one catch, however," I told them, "I have signed a contract with George Hamid to play the Police Circus in St. Louis."

They assured me that it was perfectly all right, they could fix that easily. What with

Dorothy Herbert and Ken Maynard in Rochester, Indiana on the opening day of the Cole 1938 under canvas season. Pfening Archives.



all of the acts that they had hired through the Hamid agency, he would be glad to do them this little favor and release me from my contract. So, with my mind at rest on that score, I went to my room.

The phone was ringing off the wall. When I answered, the connection was so bad I could hardly hear. All I could gather from my mother was, "Come home! Come home! Don't do anything but come home!" I grabbed my bags, checked out, and started for home. A million things that could have happened crossed my mind.

Before long I ran into the storm that had, no doubt, caused the garbled phone connection. I had trouble keeping the car on the road. Anyone who has ever been in one of those Florida storms will know what I had to contend with; wind blowing, trees falling.

Once when I stopped for gas, an attendant begged me to wait, "Lady, you could be riding into a hurricane!" But I was so frantic I went right on.

The wind and rain stopped at last, but not I; I kept right on going. Remember, when I had arrived in Sarasota, I had not had a chance to sleep; I just turned around and headed back for home. Whenever I stopped for gas, I would grab a bite to eat or drink some coffee and continue. Of course, each time I stopped I would try to call home, but was unable to get an answer.

I knew that I was weaving in the road, so when the policeman pulled me over to the side of the road, I did not try to give an explanation, I just sat. He told me to follow him to the station.

At the station I told them of driving through the storm and how tired I was. I could see that they did not believe my story. "What hotel did you say that you were staying at in Sarasota?" asked the man behind the desk.

I told him and he left. When he returned he said, "I made a phone call, and you did, indeed, leave when you claimed. You must have just escaped the brunt of the storm before most of the roads were blocked by falling trees and flooding. What we cannot understand is why you didn't have the sense to stop."

He then took me back to my car and handed me a couple of blankets and a pillow. "Now, you climb into the back seat and go to sleep. I know that you are in a great hurry, so I will not let you sleep over long. No one will bother you; after all, you are parked in front of the police station." After a reasonable length of time, he awakened me and took me back inside, where he saw to it that I drank plenty of hot, black coffee and then he sent me on my way. Once again, I had the police to thank for a helping hand.

I drove frantically home; each time I had the car filled with gas I tried to call home, but could get no answer. When I, at last, pulled into the driveway, Mother ran out to

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WORLD'S GREATEST WILD ANIMAL TRAINER! FOREMOST WESTERN SCREEN STAR!

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**FLORENCE**  
DEATH-DEFYING  
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AND  
**DOROTHY HERBERT**  
MOST DARING RIDER IN THE WORLD

BIGGER—BETTER—GRANDER—THAN EVER

1100 PEOPLE—  
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STARS—900  
MENAGERIE ANI-  
MALS—4 HERDS  
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In this 1938 Cole Bros. Circus newspaper ad used in Chicago Dorothy Herbert's name was in larger type than Clyde Beatty's and Ken Maynard's. Pfening Archives.

meet me and said, "I do hope I caught you before you signed anything. Your agent called and said he had more dates for you."

I was too tired to explain that without some sort of transportation for the horses, I would have been unable to play the dates anyway. I went to bed and stayed there for two days.

A friend of mine with a horse trailer drove

my horses to Peru, Indiana, where they were loaded on the train taking the baggage horses back to Sarasota to join the show for the coming season. I bought all sorts of things for Jimmy to eat on the trip. He filled a tub with ice and soft drinks, put up his cot in the car near to the horses, and was all set for the trip.

My return to the Ringling Brothers winter quarters was without fanfare. I went to the stables, saw that Jimmy was all right and that my stock had been properly housed, and then I inquired about my dear Satan. The ring stock boss told me that Satan had gone sour. The preceding year one of the jumping horse riders had attempted to ride him over just the ordinary hurdles. He gave her nothing but trouble, until she refused to ride him at all. He told me that Satan would run to the hurdle as if he really meant to jump and when he reached it, he would stop suddenly and knock it down. I could picture in my mind what had happened. When the rider had reached the hurdle, she had used the reins just a little to cue him, but he had been trained to jump with no reins or cue of any kind.

I asked to see him and found him tied up with a string of horses that were used in *spec*. I ordered them to put him in a box stall next to my own horses. A couple of days later I started to rehearse. Of course, I would be riding Troubadour most of the time for the waltz and rear, but I would use King Kong for rough or muddy tracks, as he was so sure-footed; then, Black Hawk for the high school act, with Lindy as an alternative.

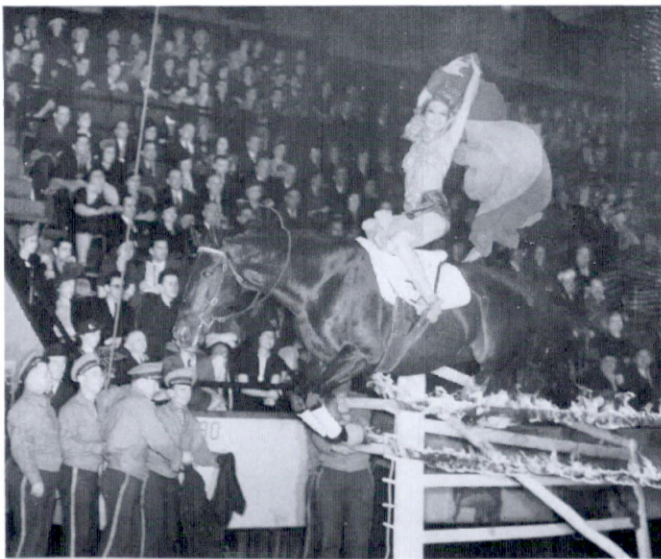
The interest of the horse trainers and management was centered around Rex. They were intending to again feature the high fire jump and were anxious to see just how good he was. He had been trained for it, and he was good—but there was no way of knowing if he had the stamina to hold up under the rigors of making that jump twice daily all season. I worked Rex for them, and they left well satisfied . . . I was not.

I called for Satan and told Jimmy to put my saddle on him. He stood quietly when they lifted me onto him. Then he walked off, with his head hanging low. This could not be my lively, spirited Satan. I had a certain call that I was in the habit of giving him just before I was ready for the jump. I got him into a canter and gave this call. He shook his head, threw up his heels, and dashed off. I motioned for them to put up the hurdle and over we went. I was delighted! Satan and I were back together again! Now, I do not mean, in any way, to low-rate Rex. He was my own, and I loved him dearly, but it

was Satan who had helped me to the top in the circus and I owed him so much.

We took the hurdle a couple of more times and, when I jumped off him, Satan came looking for his sugar. Now, I do not recommend sugar as a rule; carrots and apples are a far better treat, but when you are on the road they are not handily available, and cubes of sugar can be carried in your trunk.

Although, on the surface, it seemed that I was being welcomed back with open arms, things were not entirely compatible. They felt, and I suppose justly so, that I had played them a shabby trick by leaving them the way I did. I, in turn, had the feeling that I had been imposed on.



Dorothy Herbert making a fire jump on Satan in Madison Square Garden during the opening stand of the 1939 Ringling season. Pfening Archives.

I agreed to ride high school, waltz and rear, the Big Hitch, the fire jump, and work liberty horses if necessary, but I flatly refused to do the ride of Mazzepa unless I were compensated for it. In case you might be inclined to think, as they did, that I was just being bull-headed and stubborn, let me relate a little incident that had occurred in connection with the act.

As I have explained, while making the ride I was laying across the horse with my head and hands dragging. On this particular day, just as my horse and I came to the jump, one of the wild horses ahead of us tripped over the hurdle and the heavy pole came sailing toward me. I did not see it, nor could I have done anything about it if I had. It hit my head and knocked me out.

I didn't get to take a bow. When we reached the back door, Jimmy grabbed me off the horse and, with the help of another groom, carried me to the doctor's wagon. One eye and the side of my face was swollen and was black and blue for quite a long time

after. This all went away, but then I began to have very bad ear aches and, as it became worse, my whole head hurt. The show's doctor kept pouring some sort of drops into my ear and insisted I take some pain pills. At night I was given a hot water bottle to put on my pillow, and some sleeping pills.

I awoke one night screaming like I was being murdered, and waking up everyone within hearing distance. The porter, who had a key to everyone's stateroom, opened the door and turned on the light. My pillow was covered with blood. The show doctor was sent for. When we arrived in town the next morning, he took me to the hospital. There they discovered that when the abscess had broken, it had broken my eardrum as well. It left me completely deaf in that ear.

I figured now that if I were to chance losing the hearing in the other ear, or maybe even an eye from another accident of that kind, I ought to be paid extra money for the act. Their argument that they had all that special paper printed that they could not use, did not change my mind at all.

Herewith I must digress and offer an explanation. It will be necessary to change names and places, not to protect the innocent, but myself. Better that they remain anonymous; however, the events were real. Suppose, then, that I just call them "he" and "they," for lack of a better way.

I clashed with one of the two new horse trainers almost at once. The North brothers were attempting

to upgrade the show and give it extra class. They had bought a string of fine gaited horses and hired two excellent horsemen. Each day they would exercise these fine show horses in the open arena alongside the ring barn.

The management had offered me Nugget to again ride in center ring during the high school number, but I declined and I never rode him again. Jimmy had put my silver saddle and white bridle on Black Hawk, and a very pretty picture they made.

The younger of the two trainers happened to be passing by and remarked to Jimmy, "I would like to try out that saddle."

I stepped forward and said, "I do not mind you riding the saddle, but I am afraid the horse is a little flighty." For some reason, Black Hawk had a dislike for men.

The man looked down at me like something that had been left over from an ant's picnic. After scanning my hundred eight pounds, he replied, "I imagine I can ride anything that you can."

Black Hawk played fair—he let the man get seated and then he broke loose: he bucked and he pitched. The guy, I will give him credit, did do a good job of riding the horse, and he might have had a better chance

had he been mounted on a different saddle, but mine was not designed for that type of riding. I felt sorry for him when he bit the dust.

The next day, as I was walking by the stalls where the show horses were kept, the young man accosted me and said, "How would you like to take a ride on a good horse?" I declined.

"Not used to riding good horses, huh?" he taunted. "It takes a lot of time and training to be able to ride a gaited horse, you know."

As usual, I boiled.

"Just which one would you like for me to ride?" I asked.

He had one of them saddled. I adjusted stirrups and, without a word, mounted the horse and put it through its paces.

When I got off the horse, the man said, "No one ever told us that you knew how to ride gaited horses."

I answered, "That is how I make my living."

The long train trip from Sarasota to New York was over and we were once more in Madison Square Garden. I looked around my private dressing room, the same one that I had occupied for so many years, and wondered who might have dressed there last year. I unpacked my trunks and hung up my costumes.

The opening was a success, as far as I was concerned, and all of my numbers went off without a hitch.

It was the third day of the show when I was called to the phone in the office. A thing like this had never happened to me before. If someone wished to get in touch with you, they contacted you at your hotel. I hurried to the phone; it was George Hamid. "Miss Herbert, I hope that you have not forgotten that you have a contract to play the Police Circus in St. Louis."

"I thought that Mr. North had fixed that with you," I gasped.

"Well, you thought wrong, and you had better get there," said he.

"I am sorry, Mr. Hamid," I replied, "but there is no way I can possibly make it; you see, my horses are here in New York."

"We anticipated such an answer from you, however, they have hired the Cole Bros. Circus animals for their show, and there are horses belonging to them that you can use. Your picture is on the cover of the program and they also have a lot of publicity out on you, and if you do not get there, they are going to sue."

I hastened to Mr. North's office and explained what had happened. He told me not to worry about it, he would take care of it. My mind at ease, I returned to my dressing room. Suddenly, there was a knock on the door. It was Pat Valdo. He informed me, "You are going to have to go to St. Louis."

So, I went down to the basement where the horses were kept and had Jimmy put one of my sidesaddles in a gunny sack, of all

things, to take to the plane. One of the ladies from the wardrobe department found a large cardboard box and helped me to pack some of my costumes in it. I then sent Jimmy to the airport in a cab with these things, to wait for me while I went to the hotel to pack my bags and check out.

I removed my makeup and went to the paymaster with the money order that Mr. Valdo had given me to pay for the trip. I went to the hotel, packed, and checked out. Just as I turned to leave the desk, the clerk said, "Wait a moment, please. You have a phone call."

I could hear the spec music in the back-



Dorothy Herbert in 1939, her last year with the Ringling Bros & Barnum and Bailey Combined Shows. Circus World Museum collection.

ground, the show had begun. It was Pat Valdo on the phone; he told me to return to the Garden at once. I asked the hotel clerk to please care for my luggage and hurried back to the building, which was only a short distance from where I was staying.

When I arrived at the back door entrance, Pat Valdo grabbed my arm and announced, "We have it all fixed, you do not have to go to St. Louis and you can still make the high school number. Hurry!"

Man, I made it all right, but I only had time to get into a costume, no makeup or a chance to fix my hair. Well, at least they had squared it and I was off the hook.

As I rode out, after finishing the number, Pat again met me with the news, "We were unable to fix it, after all, and you will have to go."

I couldn't believe all this was happening. I went to my dressing room, got out of my wardrobe and into street clothes again. This time I carefully put my things into my trunks and locked them.

As I approached the back door entrance, the watchman stopped me. "I just had a call from the front office; they said for me to stop you, they are on their way here."

This time it was Mr. North, who told me, "Get dressed for the fire jump and we will explain later."

*This was getting to be like a Mack Sennet comedy.*

I hurried back to the dressing room and, somehow or other, managed to make the number. No one ever did explain how they finally were able to fix it but since I was not sued I assume they did.

But what about poor Jimmy? All of that time he had been sitting at the airport, waiting. I did not feel like trying to explain all of this mess to him over the phone, so I called a cab and went to the airport and picked him up. After we stopped for a bite to eat, and Jimmy was back at the Garden, I went to my hotel for a much needed rest.

It was a season of general animosity which had started in winter quarters and grew worse as the season went on. The horse show trainers felt themselves to be superior to the circus trainers, and, in turn, they considered the gaited horse riders a bunch of stuffed shirts. There was, also, constant bickering among the new group of circus horse trainers. In his struggle to become the Top Banana, the German, whom they had dubbed "the Dutchman," kept everyone in an uproar.

The manege and jumping horse riders were in a constant state of unrest, not knowing which side to take. Always before, the equestrians had been a little close-knit group that hung together; now they were being drawn apart. It seemed incredible that one man could so disrupt an entire crowd. Well, maybe not so incredible at that. Hitler managed to do it.

I worked hard that season. Besides the high school number, the waltz and rear, and the high fire jump, I also drove a hackney pony hitched to a cart in the gaited horse display and, when necessary, worked one of the liberty horse acts, plus, of course, the Big Hitch.

Then, too, while everyone else (I mean the performers) was still resting, I would be downtown at the broadcasting studio. Sometimes in large cities, there would be two stations to go to in the morning.

Frankly, I was tired.

I cannot recall if the season was especially long, or if it just seemed that way, but now it was drawing to an end. On closing night, John Ringling North came by in the back yard where I was seated on my horse waiting for the last ride of the year. He said for me to have a nice winter and not to worry about my horses; they would see to it that they were well taken care of while I was at home with my mother. He also told me that they had several new things planned for me to do in the coming season, and one of them was sensational.

I thanked him for everything they had done for me, wished him well, and I never saw him again. I had made up my mind I was not going back. There was no need for someone to dream up something new for me to do; I had only one neck to break and if I were going to break it, I would do it on my own, without anyone's help.

I took inventory: I had three horses of my own, King Kong, Rex, and Black Hawk; a stateroom full of furniture; two circus trunks filled with wardrobe; several suitcases for my street clothes; and a large trapping box full of my own saddles and harness--all of this with no place to go and no way to get there.

After taking my car out of storage, I asked one of the show mechanics to go with me to some used car lots in quest of a suitable truck. I learned later that no one of the show ever suspected that I would make such a move. Everyone took it for granted that now that I was back, I would stay. They felt that by now I had learned my lesson. Nevertheless, I bought a truck and had three padded stalls built into it, a good solid loading ramp, and a compartment to hold my trunks and all of the stuff from my stateroom.

While the truck was being worked on, I got in touch with Herbert Yates, who at that time owned the Republic Studios. I remembered that he had once said to me, "If you can ever come out to Hollywood, I am sure that we would be able to use you in motion pictures."

He was a very good friend of my former boss Mr. Sam Gumpertz who had introduced me to him in the first place; now I was about to take him at his word. When I called him on the long distance phone and asked him if the offer still stood, he said, "To be sure, come on."

#### CHAPTER 47 THE SHOW OFF

I left Ringling with many pleasant and some embarrassing memories.

I think that everyone likes to see a show-off put down. It had been raining steadily for three days and three nights. The poor, hard working big-top crew had managed to get the tent up and seats all in place. They had plodded off to the dining tent to be fed before the start of the night show. It had been impossible to present the matinee.

The track was a sea of mud. Straw had been scattered about, but did little good; nonetheless, there was a large crowd. The jump, for a wonder, had been called off, and I was told to do the waltz and rear, but to take it easy. Sir Christopher, who was the most surefooted and the slowest of my rearing horses, would have his turn today. When we had a bad, muddy track and rings like this, the lay down was always omitted from the high school routine and we substituted



Dorothy Hebert and Fred Bradna on Ringling-Barnum in 1939. Pfening Archives.

the one-knee. Rainy-day wardrobe was always worn in bad weather.

Now, it so happened that I had some friends who I wished to impress in the first row, center. One of my best and showiest outfits was a long white flowing evening dress trimmed in crystal beads and with this I wore a head-dress of long white feathers. This, then was my choice for the act.

My horse was perfectly trained, I'll say that for him--too perfect. When everyone else did the one-knee, he, with no cue, laid down. I, having cued him for the one-knee, was holding my whip in both hands, above my head and smiling. There was no way I could jump off in time. I went sailing, head first, into the mud and was covered from head to toe. My sense of humor kept me from making an utter ass of myself and I started to laugh. The audience, which had at first gasped, started to laugh with me and that made me giggle all the harder. I went through the rest of the act and then rode to the back door where I usually changed horses, hoping that Mr. Valdo would motion me out. I looked at Pat Valdo and he continued to look the other way, so I got on the rearing horse and finished the act. As I rode out the back door, I overheard Pat say to someone, "I sure wish our clowns could get that kind of laughs."

That reminds me of the time when I got the laugh on everybody. The Circus Saints and Sinners were giving a ball in New York City for all of their members and the performers from the Ringling Bros. Circus. It was to be a costume affair with everyone wearing a mask. The girls in the dressing rooms were discussing which of their cos-

tumes they would wear when someone suggested switching with each other. I doubted if it would fool anyone.

It had been arranged for cars to assemble at the back door to take us to the ball. The only person on the show who knew what devilment I was up to at this time was (and a better conspirator you could not find anywhere) Otto Griebing, the famous tramp clown. He worked with me several days, between shows, teaching me what to do. He was genius in the art of pantomime.

The night of the ball he came to my dressing room the first chance he had, after his part of the show was over and he could sneak in without anyone seeing him or the bundle he was carrying. As soon as I finished my last number, which closed the show, I hastily donned one of his tramp suits as he applied clown makeup to my face. What an artist he was, my own mother would not have known me. He again cautioned me: "Whatever you do--DO NOT SPEAK." Otto and I hurried down the hallway and got into the car with a now impatient driver. I handed him my suitcase and we were off.

When we reached the ball, Otto, who was dressed in an animal costume, said: "Here is where we split. Go mingle with the society people and avoid the circus folks."

The party was in full swing when we arrived. People with drinks in their hands were milling about while others crowded the dance floor. A short while later dinner was served. At the very end of the hall there was a long table, seated there were the notables from the Saints and Sinners and the star performers of the circus. These were the people who would be called upon to give a short speech. One seat at the table was empty.

I sat at the table where most of the show clowns had gathered. The circus clowns were sure that I was a townier and the other people thought that I was from the show. The band continued to play during dinner and the people were dancing, between courses. I danced with a few of the town ladies and pulled some of the silly stunts that Otto had taught me. Using pantomime, as Otto had told me to do, I kept pleading with one of the ladies for her handkerchief as a souvenir and in desperation she gave it to me. In the midst of all my fun Otto gave me the high sign, meaning it was time for me to make my exit. I went to the hat-check stand and got my suitcase, then went to the ladies room. I had a heck of a time convincing the maid that I was not only a lady but in a very big hurry. I got her to laughing at the prank I was pulling off and she assisted me in getting the makeup and my wig off and dressed in a stunning evening gown complete with a black velvet cape lined in white.

I waited outside the door while the Master of Ceremonies announced each of the personages at the head table and each one made a few remarks. Then, when the M. C. came

to my name on his list, he said: "For some reason or other, Miss Dorothy Herbert has not been able to attend tonight." Otto had made arrangements for this announcement.

With that I walked into the middle of the dance floor, threw a kiss and said, "Surprise! I have been here all of the time." Gallantly I handed the handkerchief back to the lady who had been my dancing partner and said: "Thank you, for the dance, Madame, from your humble clown."

It was absolutely amazing that no one had guessed my identity; full credit for this went to Otto. The other performers could have killed me and I did not blame them one bit. Pat Valdo was beside himself, however. He had thought that the tramp clown was a townner and had instructed one of the clowns to contact him in regards to going with the show. The next day Pat told me: "If you do not stop these foolish antics I do not know what I am going to do with you. We pay clowns to furnish comedy and we do not need any from you. Frankly, you are driving me batty."

What had I done now? This last escapade might even be too much for my friends to stomach, I thought. Maybe I had gone too far. But, much to my surprise, everyone was congratulating me on the great gag that I had pulled--except Pat Valdo, that is.

#### CHAPTER 48 UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

Another incident from my Ringling days I fondly remember was when we chose to produce Uncle Tom's Cabin for the Fourth of July entertainment. I was picked to play the part of Little Eva, not because of my acting ability, I can assure you, but because (so they said) I had long blonde hair. After we had started to rehearse, I was sure it was because of the slapstick nature of the part.

Rosie Reiffenach was cast as Topsy, and there could not have been a better choice. With her sense of humor and her German accent, she was a riot. One of the boys from an acrobatic act was Liza, and a midget took the part of her baby. All of them would work in blackface.

Between shows we would find a remote place to rehearse. As we went along, we added anything funny that came to us. No one had any idea of what we were up to, with the exception of Merle Evans. A week or so before the great day, we got the wardrobe ladies to help us with our costumes. They carried a sewing machine in one of the wagons and it sure helped, as it would have been a great deal of work to do by hand. I recall I wore a pink dress with many ruffles and a blue sash.

We put the play on between shows. Everyone took a seat in the reserved section in the big top; even the office staff was there. Most were looking quite bored as the play opened, but not for long!

Scene One: Topsy and some other little black kids were playing hopscotch. Little Eva came skipping out and asked if she might be permitted to join them. They reply by socking her in the face with a large lemon cream pie. She falls backward into a fake drum we had made for the occasion, smashing it and supposedly infuriating the drummer, who then chased her out of the tent. This, then, was our opening, and the rest of the play was on a par.

An example: hunks of ice tied to ropes were dragged across the stage. The midget, also in blackface and smoking a cigar, was perched on Eliza's shoulder as she attempted to jump from cake to cake of ice as it slid across the stage; Simon Legree, with a long lash whip and all of the show dogs we had been able to borrow, was not far behind.

The play ended with Little Eva going up a ladder to heaven. The ladder fell just as she was about to reach the top and there she hung, upside down, with a safety belt holding her. Topsy and her gang, plus the rest of the cast, then sang, "The Man On The Flying Trapeze."

Of course there was a lot more to it than this. I gave you just a few of the highlights. Zany, to be sure, but we had fun, as did everyone watching.

After the play we served refreshments. Later, the band played while all who cared to danced on the stage until someone hollered, "Doors!" the cue that the public was about to enter. Everyone said that they had enjoyed it and would look forward to our next audition.

#### CHAPTER 49 CALIFORNIA BOUND

I told Mr. Yates I had no idea how long it might take me to get there, but I was on my way. When the shows closed back in those

Dorothy Herbert and clown Shorty Flemm on Ringling-Barnum in 1939. Pfening Archives



days there were always a lot of men out of work. Rodger Oberman, who I had heard was an excellent truck driver, offered to take the job after hearing that I needed one. I explained to him that I would not be able to pay very much, as I was not quite sure what was going to happen. (Understatement of the year.)

My groom, Jimmy, was going with me, of course, and, at the last minute Jack Gibson, who also worked on ring stock, asked if he might go along. His sister lived near Hollywood and he was planning to spend the winter with her. I figured that I already had enough help, but he assured me he would pay his way by cooking for all of us. I had all of the equipment: stove, ice box, etc, and so we started out.

If, perchance, you are wondering how come no one became inquisitive and inquired as to what was transpiring, I can think of only one explanation. For the first few weeks after the show closed nearly everyone took some time off. Since the horse trainers were not yet back working, there was no reason for them to go to the stables. The main offices were some distance from the barns, and the grooms did not hobnob with the office staff, anyway. Be that as it may, we loaded up and left without anyone noticing us.

Thus ended all of those glorious years with the "Greatest Show On Earth." I wonder if they ever did notice that I was gone.

As I write this I cannot help but think what a foolhardy thing that was to do: to start out on a trip from coast to coast in a second hand truck, with three horses and three men, my car, and not too much money after buying and rebuilding the truck. When I was young it seems I spent most of my time taking chances of one sort or another, and usually getting into a mess.

Now, California was a lot farther from Florida than it looked on the map. It soon became evident that I was not going to be able to finance this trip. The men slept in the truck, but I, of course, went to a motel each night. Many of the fairgrounds where we stopped charged for staying over and watering; then there was the feed for the stock and all of us, plus gas for the two vehicles. I was becoming quite alarmed, but kept my worries to myself.

Along about this time we were passing by where a rodeo was showing and the men wanted to stop. They got to talking to some of the rodeo hands and must have been bragging about our horses, because the promoter came over to the seats and asked if I would care to work some of his shows as a special attraction. I jumped at the chance; so now we were in the rodeo business! I was glad for the opportunity to make some money and be able to continue with what I now regarded as my *cross country tour*.

The first date for him led to other rodeos and also some fairs.

Vern Elliot, who was the producer of the Fort Worth Fat Stock Show, caught my acts and booked me for that one. This was one of the big, important rodeos, quite unlike the little fly-by-nights which we were now working. We were going to make it after all. Believe it or not, we were having fun, and working, too.

It was in Harlingen, Texas, that bad luck caught up with us. We were playing a celebration there: the Charro Days. It was an annual event which ran for five days and riders and revelers from both Texas and across the border participated. The costumes worn by the Mexican charros and their señoritas were absolutely fantastic: gold and silver braids woven into fabrics of every hue; glittering with spangles galore. I was told that the womenfolk spent hours and hours on these creations, and it was not hard to believe.

Each day a street parade was held, with much dancing and singing, which was joined in by onlookers who came from miles around. Some of them remained the whole five days, either staying with friends or camping at a site which had been arranged for them at the edge of town.

Harlingen had a fairgrounds of sorts, and this was where the rodeo was held. It was not one of the top rated shows on the rodeo circuit, but it was, by far, the noisiest and the most enthusiastically received that I have ever witnessed.

The Mexican charros entered into each event with no thought whatsoever for life or limb. Whether they won or lost, everyone still cheered. There were two shows each day; the rodeo was set up in the infield, and I worked on the track in front of the grandstand. The high school and the waltz and rear were sandwiched in between events, with the high fire jump closing the show.

On the third day of the show the weather, which up until now had been ideal, turned cold. By the middle of the night performance it had started to drizzle, then turned to sleet. I asked the manager of the show if I might omit the fire jump. He was adamant, insisting that I go on. He pointed to the fact that I had a *pay or play* contract. I, in turn, drew his attention to the track, which now had small patches of ice forming on it.

I was too inexperienced to know that no person can force another to attempt a feat in which an element of danger has been added, making it almost certainly doomed to failure: such as asking a diver to jump into a pool from which the water had been removed; or asking a shod horse to gallop on ice.

Thinking only of the money, which we were sorely in need of, I had Jimmy saddle up Rex. Rodger lit the pole for the fire jump, but it was so sodden with water that it went out at once. Rex cleared the jump but fell when he landed on the other side. He was not harmed, but my leg was broken. Rodger picked me up in his arms and carried me to

my car, while Jimmy caught Rex with the aid of a couple of cowhands; then Rodger whisked me away to a doctor.

The doctor put a cast on my leg and advised me to stay off of it for some time. We had a couple of weeks layoff before our next date; and at the end of that time I went to another doctor and had him reinforce the cast and we went on. What else was there to do?

It so happened that the leg which had been broken was my right one, the one that I had learned to throw up in the air and still hang on to the horse. I had grown not to depend on it for either grip or balance. Had it been my



Dorothy Herbert in the back yard of the Ringling-Barnum show in 1939. Pfenning Archives.

left leg, that fit under the sidesaddle horn and upon which I depended almost entirely, I would not have been able to ride at all.

When we arrived in Fort Worth, Texas, Mr. Elliot was very upset when he saw me with a cast on my leg, and said that I ought not to have come. I assured him that I had just finished two other shows and would be all right. The shows went off smoothly, with no mishaps. I wore long flowing evening gowns and the cast was not noticeable.

After this engagement I felt we had enough money put aside to finish the journey to California. I had bought each of the men a new outfit and they were in good spirits as we set off on the last lap of our trip.

It was our second day on the road after leaving Fort Worth. It was very late and we had not yet been able to find a place to unload, water and feed the horses and spend the night. I was overly tired and my leg was bothering me. We had started out early and had driven all day; we pulled into an all-

night restaurant and filling station, (I will never forget the name) the Black Cat.

As we were leaving, there was a group of people standing outside, chatting. We had eaten our late supper in the cafe and, after filling up the truck with gas, I told the boys to go on ahead, I would service my car, pay the bill, and catch up with them down the road. My back was turned when I heard a crash and screams, then mass confusion.

I ran out onto the road where my truck and another had collided. "Rodger," I said, "I know you are tired, tell me the truth--was it your fault?"

He assured me that it was not. Just as he was pulling out of the driveway, this other truck, which had been coming in the opposite direction, suddenly swerved over to his side of the road and crashed into him. Jack, who was seated next to Rodger, told me that this was indeed the case.

Sure now of my grounds, I borrowed a pencil and paper from the restaurant cashier and asked all of the bystanders who had seen the accident to write down their names and where they might be reached. Since it was a moonlit night and the place was well lighted, they had been able to see everything clearly. I had already told Jack and Jimmy, who was riding in the back of the truck with the horses, to unload them and see if any of the horses had been hurt.

By now the highway patrol had arrived and Jack came running up to tell me that they would not allow him to touch anything. I went to the officer who seemed to be in charge and informed him that I was placing a call to the Humane Society. I demanded his name and badge number. I was pretty sure that they would not be open at this hour of the night . . . but the bluff worked.

The officer told me that to him, this was an unusual accident and he was not quite sure of the procedure, however, he gave his permission for us to unload. There were scratches on the horses and, although nothing serious, I suspect I made quite a *to-do* about it.

In the meantime, the ambulance had come and gone and I was beginning to feel faint. I went into the cafe for a glass of water, and gave the pencil back to the lady; strange that something like that could matter at a time like this. It was then that I found that the driver of the other truck, and mine, as well, were under arrest, and learned for the first time how serious the accident had actually been. I was heartsick. My truck was wrecked, Rodger was under arrest, my horses were standing by the side of the road, and I had no one to turn to for help. It was then that the kind warm hearted people of this little town came to my rescue. They moved away from the corner where they had been in a huddle, having some sort of a discussion. They came over to the table where I was seated and everyone began talking at once. There was an old, unused hay barn

down the road where the horses could stay, and the men could sleep on their cots there, too. The owner of a small motel offered me a room at a very reduced rate. Everyone was so very kind.

A wrecker came and hauled my truck away to be repaired, and the men and I settled down to wait for the trial. Several days later we learned that a woman who had been in the truck had died in the hospital where she had been taken; she was five months pregnant. I was very worried; we were strangers here, showfolks to boot; and the townspeople would all be friends.

I need not have worried so. When it came time for the trial, all of those honest people who were eyewitnesses described just what had happened. All of the facts came to light the first day of the interrogation. There had been five people seated in the cab of the pickup truck. The two women were on the men's laps. All of them had been drinking. The case went on until noon when everyone, except the two drivers who were still in custody, was excused for lunch.

Shortly after we returned, the second woman that had been riding in the pickup truck, and who had been unharmed except for some bruises, was called to the witness stand.

She testified that just before the crash, the driver of the pickup had said, "Would you like to see me hit that big red truck?" He had meant only to make the women scream, then swerve out of the way just in the nick of time, but he had lost control and, thus, the crash.

After her testimony, Rodger, my driver, was released. During the trial it had come out that the driver of the pickup truck had been using his boss' truck without his permission. We never learned just what happened to him and did not care.

My truck had been repaired and we were now ready to continue on. The only trouble was that we were, again, out of money. While talking to some of the rodeo performers at shows which we had played, I had picked up the name Harry Rowell. From the performers, I knew that he put on a lot of shows in California; impulsively, I phoned him.

He remembered me after I told him who I was, as he had attended the Fort Worth Fat Stock Show. When I told him that I needed work, he said, "Of course, come on, I can use your acts."

I was very embarrassed to have to explain that I did not have the money to get there. Laughingly, he said, "So, what's new? You rodeo people are usually broke. So, how much will it take to get you here?"

I can't say I liked the "you rodeo people" much, but I did like the way he operated. I named a figure and picked up the money the next morning at Western Union.

Working his shows was fun. He owned a big cattle ranch in Hayward, California. He

was not a rodeo promoter; he owned all of his own stock and equipment and produced his own shows. Besides his stock trucks, he brought along to his shows a truck which was referred to as the "chuck wagon," and each evening after the show was over there would be a big barbecue for all of the help. I liked his approach to show business.

By now my reader might be inclined to wonder what effect, if any, all of these delays might be having on my employer-to-be, Mr. Herbert Yates. From time to time I had been getting in touch with him to let him know how we were progressing, or not progressing, which was mostly the case.

I confided a few of our problems to him,



This publicity photo of Dorothy Herbert was taken by Republic Studios in 1939. Author's collection.

omitting the one about the broken leg, of course; no use to worry him unduly. At first he seemed to be sympathetic, but, as time went on, I began to sense that my stories were beginning to lack credibility, because the last time I called, he asked me if, by any chance, I might be making the journey by wagon train.

So now, although we could have stayed and played some more of his shows, I thanked Mr. Rowell and we were, once more, on our way to Hollywood. Maybe not with stars in our eyes, but, at least, with a few bucks in our pockets.

As we crossed the state line into California, I could not help but feel more proud than I had ever felt before at the courage and fortitude of our pioneer ancestors; they had made this trip without even the aid of a road map. And, while we had encountered both Indians and Mexicans at the rodeos, none of them had been hostile; in fact, they had all been downright friendly.

Later, when I told this to Mr. Yates, he

said, "Even with everything in your favor, the pioneers made better time than you did."

## CHAPTER 50 HOLLYWOOD

Upon our arrival in California, we went directly to Burbank to the stables of a friend of mine, Sam Garret. He was a very famous trick roper and had been the world's champion several times; now he owned a boarding stables and training arena.

I rented a stall for each of the horses. Sam had a small guest house which I rented for myself; Jack left for his long awaited visit with his sister; Rodger stayed for a few days and then got a job as a truck driver with a transportation company. Our paths did not cross again. Jack Gibson was another story and we were to meet many times during the years to come; being very knowledgeable about horses, he became the ring stock boss on the Cole Bros. Circus. Jimmy, of course, stayed with me. He slept in the bunkhouse with the other help, and ate at a restaurant a short distance away.

After a couple of days of much needed rest I drove to the Republic Studios and reported to Mr. Yates that I was ready to go to work. He called in his production manager and told him that I was to be included in the next serial that was filmed.

Mr. Yates explained to him that what he had in mind was a girl star that would do all kinds of stunts; come to the rescue, as it were (and save the old homestead, I supposed); a sort of Gene Autry or Roy Rogers . . . minus the singing, I hoped. Mr. Yates then ordered a screen test to be made right away. Since this was on a Friday, I was told to report Monday morning, early.

On Monday, after I had finished with the makeup man and the hairdresser and was outfitted in western garb, I was driven to location. The makeup man and the hairdresser rode in the car with me.

I did not know what I expected, but certainly not a test on a horse! There stood this big white horse with a huge, silver mounted, western saddle. The wrangler who was holding him told me that he was one of the three "look alikes" which belonged to the studio and were used in *The Lone Ranger* series. Silver had two doubles, each had a different function. This was the one they used when a scene called for a rear.

The wrangler adjusted the stirrups which were, of course, far too long. Another man drew a line on the ground and the director informed me that I was to gallop up to that line and rear the horse. No one bothered to tell me what the cue was to make the horse rear, and there was no one around to ask.

I cantered the horse up to the line and, upon reaching it, I pulled on the reins. The horse made what was to me, after the horses that I had been used to, a very half-hearted

rear. "O.K." called the director, "the next one will be a take."

Far from satisfied, I thought to myself: I am not going to settle for this, I am going to have to make it look good.

This time, when I reached the line, I yanked on the reins and the horse reared all right--and fell over backwards. I picked myself up out of the dirt and was in for another surprise.

The director was jumping up and down and shouting to the cameraman, "Did you get it? Did you get it? That will make a great stock shot."

The dirt was brushed off of me, the hairdresser cleaned my hair with something that smelled like naphtha gas, and the makeup man repaired my smudged face. The wrangler brushed off the horse, which was unharmed, and the director called for another shot, which must have suited him because after it was over they loaded everything and we went back to the studio.

I hung around the telephone awaiting the verdict. Before leaving Florida I had been under the impression that it was a foregone conclusion that I would be featured in a motion picture. Why else would I have attempted that hectic trip? When the phone rang at last, it was Mr. Yates' secretary advising me to report to Mr. Yates' office the following morning.

When I expressed my concern to Mr. Yates the next day, he laughed. "That is a normal procedure; everyone has a screen test. We have to know how you are going to photograph. You photograph well. Your hair will have to be lightened some, and you need to lose about ten pounds, which you will have time to do, because the next serial to be made is *Fu Manchu*, and there is no way that they could write you into that one." He told me they would send for me in a few weeks. In the long run, this was a break for me, considering the stunts that I was required to do. It gave my leg, which was still bothering me, more time to heal.

Sam Garret's practice arena was large. I had Jimmy set up the hurdles for Rex to jump; I also worked Black Hawk and King Kong. I knew that I would be expected to do a lot of Western riding, so I asked Sam for his assistance in locating a horse of that type. Certainly he knew of a lot of places to go to look, and we found one suited for what I wanted the second day. I bought it and went to work training it for trick riding.

After I had been at the Garret ranch a short time, Sam told me that some of the people that were boarding their horses at his stable were very interested in having their horses trained, and also in learning to ride jumps. They wanted him to ask if I might be interested.

I welcomed the chance to earn some mon-

ey while waiting around for a picture to start. We formed several classes; they were a jolly crowd and I liked working with them.

Several times a week I would have to drive to the studio and work with the writers there in regard to the stunts that I would be doing in the picture. The script was finished at last, and they gave me a copy.

It was to be a serial: *The Mysterious Doctor Satan*. I was cast as the doctor's secretary and, from the looks of things, I would spend most of my time rescuing him and his daughter from all sorts of predicaments. I studied the first episode over and over. Then I found, to my dismay, that they did not start at the beginning and go through the story, but were going to shoot an episode I hadn't even read yet.



This Republic Studio photo shows Dorothy Herbert in a scene in *The Mysterious Doctor Satan* serial produced in 1939. Author's collection.

The first day of shooting took place indoors on a sound stage. I had been told to report at an ungodly hour of the morning to the hairdresser and makeup man. I had already been fitted for wardrobe a few days earlier. Someone handed me a briefcase and I was told by the director to enter a room filled with an assortment of people and, without attracting the attention of any of them, convey to a large man wearing a mask, the secret formula that I had in my possession, hidden in the briefcase. All of these greedy people were seeking to get their hands on this formula. This action was to take place without speaking a single word.

During the short time that I had gone to the Paramount Dramatic School in New York, I had not been coached on anything like this.

I opened the door and walked in, letting the door slam shut behind me, causing everyone in the room to look in my direction.

The director called for us to try it again, quietly.

This time, after turning around and pushing the door shut gently, I gazed up at this hunk of man, who appeared to be eight feet tall and, with the look of a dying calf, gave him a sickly grin and glanced down at the object I was holding in my clammy hands. Everyone seemed surprised except the director. He was stunned.

I had a feeling I wasn't making much of a hit with the director when he inquired, "How many pictures have you appeared in?"

And I told him, "None, so far." That's when I heard him mumble, "I get them all." I guess he figured that I was someone's movie-struck girlfriend who was being pushed off on him, but, since he did not know whose, he didn't say anything more.

I was taken to a far-off corner, and when my instructor felt I was ready for it, they shot the scene. Meanwhile, of course, they had been taking other shots. Nothing more was said until a couple of days later.

All of those concerned with this particular episode had been driven to another studio that had a large sound stage, with a boat and real water. I was dressed in a navy blue sailor suit trimmed in white. When I walked onto the set I noticed another girl dressed in the same sort of outfit as mine, and with the same kind of hair-do.

As I drew near, I could not help but overhear the argument which she was having with one of the prop men; it had to do with the stunt which she had been requested to perform. I walked over to the director and told him that I was supposed to do all of my own stunt work and not use a double.

To which he quipped, "And I assume that you are going to do the horse stunts, too?"

Before the filming began I had been requested to lose a little weight, as they told me the camera adds about ten pounds to the way you look. I had managed to take the weight off, so, at that time, I weighed 105 pounds, and hardly looked like a roughneck rider. Why this man had not been informed of the work I was to do, I will never know.

One of the scriptwriters, who happened to be standing nearby and heard him, said, "That's right, Mr. Brown, she does her own stunts. That is why she is in the picture in the first place. In fact, most of these stunts were her own original suggestions, or else devised from some that she has already done."

In the scene which they were about to shoot, six men were having a fight; the good guys and the bad guys. I was supposed to climb up a ladder, grab a rope with one hand, swing off, and hit a couple of the bad guys in the back, knocking them down. I was then to pick up a gun that had been dropped on the deck, and shout: "Hold it, boys!"

Now this was not much of a stunt for an aerialist, plus the fact that I had hung up a

web (a piece of rope equipment used on circuses) at Sam's and had been practicing on it. Here, however, they had a rope run through a pulley, with two men holding it. When the time came, they would give the rope a yank, and down I would come. I told them the way I thought it ought to be done and was informed that they had been performing such stunts since before I was born.

Came time for the shot, someone called, "Action," they yanked, the rope slipped, giving them a rope burn, and they let go; I was sailing across the deck on my backside. Now, the floor was made of rough lumber, and the shot they got (I saw it later) was me howling, "Splinters!"

I was sent to the studio doctor and, after he had removed the splinters, we again tried the scene. This time they agreed to give my way a try, and it worked fine.

On account of bad weather, up until now we had been shooting all indoor scenes; but now that the sun was out we were told that the next day we would go on location. So, the next morning the actors were loaded into cars, the crew and extras were loaded into big buses, and we were driven out to the mountains not too far away.

The scene, which the studio writers and I had written together, called for a horse to do a quite difficult jump. They had brought out some horses from the stable that furnished them to the studio. When I looked at the horse I was supposed to use, I said, "This horse will not do. I am sure that he has not been trained for it." The director consulted with the head wrangler, and he agreed. They had no horse in their stable that could do the stunt as written. "What are we supposed to do now?" asked the director. "I wish they would stop writing in things that require animals with specialized training."

I spoke up then and told him that I had the horse that had been trained to do the stunt, and that it had been written into the script at my suggestion. I do not think that he quite believed me; nevertheless, he told the head wrangler to send someone to pick up the horse and bring it to the set.

I went to the phone and called Jimmy at the barn and told him to have Rex ready, a studio truck was on the way; also, to bring my own saddle, and for him to come along, too. Even if the horse had been adequate, in my opinion, to take the jump, I could not have accomplished it without my own specially equipped saddle. Since the director did not see fit to discuss any of the upcoming scenes with me ahead of time, I saw no reason to stick my neck out and offer any unsolicited suggestions. I often wondered if he and I would ever become compatible.

When they unloaded Rex, I told Jimmy to saddle him. It took a special know-how to saddle my horses; extra safety girths, etc. to keep the saddle from slipping. Since Jimmy did not belong to the union, they had a standby wrangler to assist him.

In this scene, the doctor, for whom I worked as secretary, and his daughter were being held captive. In order to obtain their freedom, the doctor must reveal the secret of his new formula, which he steadfastly refused to do. I had to climb up an outside trellis and get into the shack through a small hole in the roof. After undoing the ropes with which they were tied, I then led them out a back door where several horses were tied to a hitching rack. As they were galloping off to safety, I espied two of the villains approaching. In order to divert their attention, I



This action shot shows Dorothy Herbert on Rex doing her own stunt riding in the Republic serial *The Mysterious Doctor Satan*. Author's collection.

mounted my horse and galloped off in the opposite direction.

Now, in a scene like this, where there was an element of danger involved, they did not call for a rehearsal; instead, several cameras were called into play and they tried to get it on film with the first shot.

Suddenly, in my path there loomed a high fence; it looked as if I were trapped. I galloped Rex toward it, and just as he was about to jump, a shot rang out and I fell into my layback, with one leg in the air, hands dragging, as though I had been hit. Since I did not know how long they would be following me with the cameras, I remained in that position until the pickup men caught up with me.

When I rode back, the entire crew applauded. Evidently they did not attend the circus very much or they would have seen me perform this stunt. Then it came to me: the Ringling Bros. Circus had not played the west coast since I had added this to the jumping number, so it was new to them.

The director was delighted. As I jumped off of my horse he came over and put his arm around me. "One of the writers said that you

would do your own stunts, but I had not expected anything quite like this. It was great. And now I do remember seeing you ride in a circus."

"Thanks," I retorted, "and if you add, 'when I was a little boy on my Daddy's lap,' I think that I shall slap you." That really broke him up. I have never heard anyone laugh louder. I was twenty-eight years old.

From then on the director and I were the best of friends. He consulted me before each stunt and used my horses for the rest of the picture. When it came time for the trick riding parts, and he found that I had

had the foresight to buy a horse and train him for the special stunts, he was indeed pleased. I was happy that the director, Bunny Brown, and I were finally in accord, because some of the subsequent scenes were to call for understanding and patience.

We were at a new location, one with long, winding roads that would give them plenty of room to film long shots of the chases on the docket for that day. Everyone not working in a shot was looking for a shady spot to sit; it was so very hot, and the sun kept beating down upon us.

Now it was time for some of the trick riding. The script called for me to be galloping down the road with one of the bad guys in hot pursuit. He is madly firing his gun at me. In order not to get

hit from behind, and also to be able to return his fire, I go into a fender drag, placing me facing him.

The gun was heavy and, for some reason, the horse bucked. I had practiced this stunt in Sam's arena, and had been able to do it four times in a row, which I figured was quite enough and all that would be required. Instead, they had me do it over and over and shot it from different angles. I repeated the drag sixteen times.

When I got off of my horse at last, I asked that someone help me to remove my boot. They could not get it off, my ankle was so swollen. They sent for the doctor, who cut off the boot and sent me home.

I figured I had blown it for sure that time. Then the director called me at home and told me to take it easy, they were shooting scenes in which I did not take part, and to call them when I felt that I was ready to go back to work. Needless to say, I recovered hastily and went back to work before I actually should have. Mr. Brown sensed this and held off some of the hard scenes until he felt that I was ready.

Sam Garret did a lot of stunt work in pictures and I asked the man in charge of casting to use him whenever possible as a double for one of the villains. This worked out great, as we were able to practice and work

out some of the stunts at home in Sam's arena.

There was one incident where the doctor's daughter and I had been captured by enemies of her father: we were riding down the road ahead of the man who was taking us, at gun point, to his boss; ahead of us was an overhanging tree branch; I spurred my horse and he rushed forward; I grabbed the branch and swung off of my horse, hitting the villain, who was not far behind me, with both of my feet knocking him off of his horse, which I drop down upon astride, and the doctor's daughter and I dash away to freedom. Sam and I practiced this at the ranch and had the stunt ready when they called for it.

The trick riding horse worked out fine, and I used King Kong in some of the scenes where a rearing horse was called for. They painted a star on his forehead so that he would look like Rex, as I was supposed to still be riding the same horse. Black Hawk was never used at all.

The story ran on and on, with me saving either the doctor or his daughter from one danger after another. Horses were not always part of the plot; sometimes I would use an automobile, and a couple of times even a plane. I dragged them out of a burning building, rescued them from a sinking boat, stopped a runaway wagon they were riding in, and saved them from a mine that was being blown up.

When a real knock down, drag out, action was in progress, I would call for some of the doctor's ranch hands and the *masked man* to come to the rescue.

They saved the big scene for the last day of shooting, although it was not the last episode of the picture: the jump through the window with my hands tied behind me. I was locked in a barn with my hands and feet tied; there was a big battle going on outside; three men rode in, jumped off of their horses, shoed them into stalls without bothering to tether them, and ran outside to join in the gunplay; they bolted the door from the outside as they left.

I manage to work my feet free and jump onto one of their horses; in order to get out of the barn I was to jump the horse through the window; my hands are tied behind me and I am to hold the reins in my teeth.

The panes of the window were made of sugar and resin and put together with balsa wood. The property man told me that my horse would be all right. Rex was scheduled to do the window jump, but when I saw the setup I flatly refused to use him. In order to go through the window, the horse did not jump but rather they had a steep ramp to run him down and he crashed into it. You could not see through the glass, and I knew that if I were to subject Rex to something like that it would ruin him for the reinless jump.

Production was held up while awaiting the arrival of a horse from the Hudkins

Stables which furnished the stock for Republic Studios. Before it was over I was indeed thankful that I had insisted on a change of horses.

Here I was, sitting on this strange horse with my hands tied behind my back (we had shot the part where I had jumped onto his



Three sheet poster used by Republic in 1939. Dorothy Herbert is listed at the bottom with the other players. Philip Sills Collection, Ohio State University Library for Communication and Graphic Arts.

back from a bale of hay) and I am holding the nasty tasting reins in my teeth. The director had told me that this would be a one-time shot, no retakes. Making up another window would not only be costly but time consuming as well. Cameras would be shooting from all different angles.

I noticed that a lot of people from other sets had congregated, and then I espied the ambulance. I asked one of the property men about it, and he said, "With something like this you never can tell."

Once more the assistant director advised everyone that this was to be a one-time take. The men in the barn with me started to finger their lash whips; they meant to see that this horse went through that window. The call for "Action" came and all hell broke loose: each one of those whip happy loons seemed to think that he was the only one there and get-

ting the horse through the window was up to him alone.

Crash! Out the window we went . . . and went . . . and went. The pickup men who were to catch the horse were having trouble trying to overtake us. There was nothing I could do with my hands tied behind me, and I had long since dropped the reins I held in my mouth for fear of losing all of my teeth.

Of course, they eventually caught up with me and dragged the horse and me back to the set where I was congratulated for a fine job. It was then that I looked at the poor horse which I had been riding. True, the candy glass did not cut, but the wood had. The horse had several long scratches. I was thankful that I had not used Rex for the shot, but I was concerned about the poor studio horse. After looking it over, the head wrangler came over to tell me that the horse was all right and not to worry about it any more.

Bunny Brown, the director, overhearing this, said, "That's right, it might have been your face. You know we were all very worried about that scene. In the picture where a stunt man doubled for the star in Jesse James, for the jump through the window he had a hat pulled down, partly covering his face."

And so the picture was now finished. The director was pleased with it and so was Mr. Yates. There would be a period of waiting to see the reaction.

In the meantime, I was presented to an up-and-coming Western star who had the privilege of choosing his own leading ladies. Mr. Yates thought that I might be a nice addition to his cast, but the cowboy singer was not impressed; he felt that I would be a distraction. He preferred weepy, clinging damsels and not, as he said after looking at some of the rushes from my recent little endeavor, "a female Tarzan of the Apes."

Mr. Yates said that he would instruct the head of casting at his studio to use me whenever possible. My future here seemed debatable, and with three horses and Jimmy to take care of I needed something more tangible than vague promises.

At this point the Cole Bros. Circus came to town. Of course I went to visit them. I was given a center front row seat, but I did not get to see much of the show. Mr. Terrell sat on one side of me and Mr. Adkins on the other. They told me that the show had done very well that season. Everyone had been wondering where in the world I had been hiding myself; they wanted me to come back to their show. Before the performance was over I had agreed to join them for the coming season. They told me I could put my horses and equipment on their train, with Jimmy to care for them, complete my business, and join them later. The wandering gypsy was going home to the circus where she belonged.

# JOE CONWAY

## Motion Picture and Circus Showman

By Tony Conway

*In the feature "Short Sketches of Former Shows" in the November-December 1987 issue of Bandwagon, Joe Bradbury discussed the Reo Bros. Circus of 1936 and 1944 and the Dix Bros. Circus of 1945 and their owner, Joseph (Joe) Conway. In this article, the author, his nephew, will expand on Joe Conway's professional career, one devoted entirely to the entertainment business.*

Joseph (Joe) Conway, the seventh child of a Philadelphia soap manufacturer and his wife, was born April 4, 1900 and died February 28, 1959. Pertinent to this piece are two of his older brothers, Anthony J. (Tony) Conway, Sr., the author's father, and J. Rudolph ("Ru" or "Rudy") Conway.

At an early age, Joe and another, older man (a relative by marriage) toured with their own vaudeville act, probably doing a song and dance routine. Making his way to Hollywood, he appeared in supporting roles in a number of films, including some Charlie Chaplin efforts. Returning to Philadelphia, one of a number of eastern cities with its own movie studios, he continued to work in supporting roles in films. Later, he had his own motion picture distributorship.

In the 1920s, Joe became a theatre manager for the Stanley Company of America, a leading operator of motion picture and vaudeville-movie houses in the Philadelphia area. It was while with this organization, which later became the Stanley Warner Theatre chain, that Joe Conway met J. Deniston (Denny) Berkery, another of the company's house managers. The two became life-long friends.

By the early 1920s, Patrick Lawler, a Philadelphia area builder and developer, had built and owned the Killegarry Apartments in the 69th Street area of Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, which housed his 69th Street Theatre, and the more suburban Egyptian Theatre in Bala-Cynwyd, Pennsylvania. Managing the 69th Street was Denny Berkery and Joe Conway was managing the Egyptian. When, much like something out of a book, Joe married his boss' daughter, Mary Alice Lawler, Denny was best man.

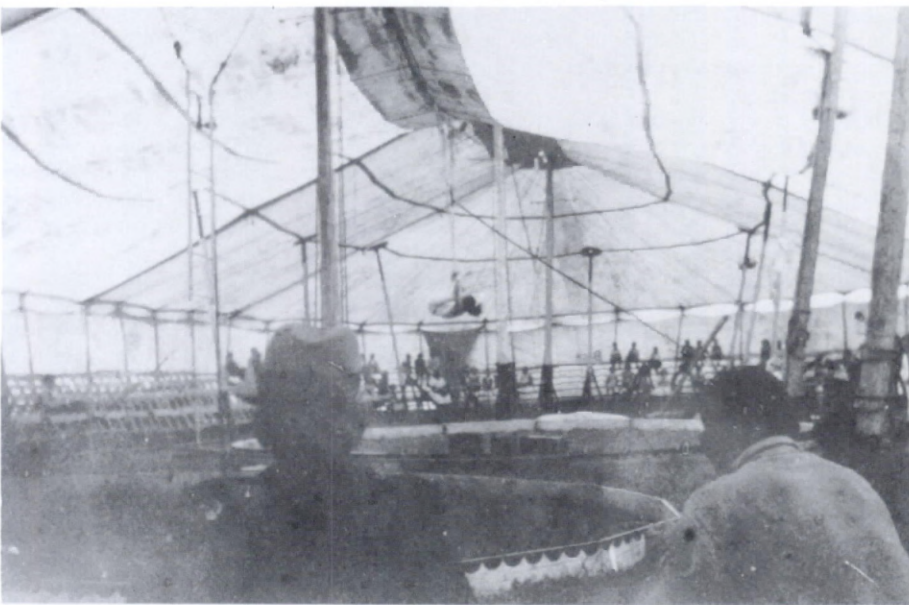
Joe Conway's Egyptian not only provided first run movies and all the components of then contemporary movie going, but much, much more. Attending Sunday Mass at St. Mathias where the Lawlers went was a family of young people who soon found themselves singing in the church choir. They became friends of the Lawler girls and soon "a



Joe Conway. All illustrations are from the author's collection.

benefit performance" at the Egyptian was arranged. Thus, in February 1944, did the Trappe Family Singers (later immortalized by Broadway and Hollywood in *The Sound of Music*) make one of their first American appearances. That wasn't really an innovation, but many of Joe's efforts were. For one date in June 1942, the entire theatre front was covered with canvas to suggest a big top and two midway-type ticket boxes replaced the usual glassed-in box office. Inside, the

Interior of the original Reo Bros. big top. A single trap performer is in mid background.



stage became an indoor circus. Another time, Singers Midgets were featured. This being in the 1930s, there were also such attractions as "china night," "amateur night," and "jitterbug" contests. For the jitterbug events, contestant couples came not only from the immediate suburban Philadelphia area but also from points in several adjoining states.

Joe's brother, Ru (April 23, 1893-November 3, 1973), had long been interested in the circus business. A friend's mother ran a boarding house where circus men-performers and staff-lived when Barnum & Bailey, Forepaugh-Sells, etc., played Philadelphia and there Ru met many people including Pat Valdo when he was still courting the then Laura Meers. On at least one occasion, Ru wrote Zack Terrell seeking employment with Sells-Floto. It was back in this period that Ru became a life-long friend of James M. Cole.

This brings us to the first (1936) Reo Bros. show. Maybe it was the influence of his brother, Ru, or maybe his friendship with Denny Berkery that led Joe to take out Reo. The details are lost. The family surmises that Denny had a financial interest in the show. Yes, Adele Nelson's Elephants, trained and presented by Louis Reed, was one of the features. Over the years, I've heard it said that the show was "over the nut" and it's highly likely the elephant act stayed only a short time. Herbert A. Douglas was a staffer.

The 1944 Reo Bros.: The Chestnut Theatre, Philadelphia, address on the letterhead

was that of the Bert Hammond Theatrical Agency which Joe Conway had used in obtaining acts for the Egyptian Theatre. It isn't known if the Hammond organization was used in assembling the Reo performance. George and Margaret Barton were certainly with the show; Lew Barton may well have been there too. Denny Berkery took over managing the Egyptian while Joe was on the road with Reo Bros.

The *Bandwagon* article mentions not only Denny Berkery, Herb Douglas, and George and Margaret Barton, but Bob Dickman, Sam Dock, and Sam's daughter, Claire Brison. All of these circus people remained good friends of Joe and Ru Conway throughout the remainder of their lives. On one occasion, Ru and I traveled out to West Chester, Pennsylvania by interurban trolley (the famous Red Arrow Lines) to visit the circus farm of Margaret and George Barton when they were framing their Bond Bros. Circus. Another Reo-Dix stalwart, Ed Schuster, was scheduled to be their general agent as he sometimes may have been for Joe's shows. Another time, Ru and I traveled far up into a tiny place in Pennsylvania to visit Lee Bros., owned and operated by Ray and Claire Brison. The show was named for one of the Brison sons. Way up in years, Sam Dock and his almost equally old "valet" worked a pickout pony and I think I recall a dog act. I believe Claire had a single-trap act. Ray Brison had the side show among other duties; I think he sometimes had the side show on Hunt's. Bob Dickman often turned up to run Hunt's cookhouse. I have a photo of Bob Dickman, Ru Conway and Charles T. Hunt, Sr. in the Hunt living room in Florence, New Jersey.

As to the origin of the Reo and Dix titles, Joe's son, my cousin Jim, and his mother, agree that Joe was seeking a short easy-to-remember title and, looking around, saw a Reo truck and said something like "That's

Dix Bros. Circus on the lot in Lamotte, Pennsylvania April 23, 1945.



Joe Conway beneath the marquee of the Egyptian Theatre with canvas and ticket boxes.

it!" Similarly, looking for a short title for the 1945 show he came up with the name of the movie star Richard Dix and that was that. I don't think Joe ever used either title as his middle name. Herb Douglas and Ru Conway corresponded and traveled together for years and enjoyed their own sense of humor; either of them may have originated using the Reo (or Dix) designation in advertising and in trade paper articles. I don't think Joe thought it was very funny.

As to my recollections of the Reo and Dix shows, I have none. I was never on the lot and never saw a performance. One evening

Joe Conway and Herb Douglas outside the Egyptian Theatre in 1942.



in 1936, father and mother took my brother Tom and me for a ride from Haddon Heights, New Jersey to either Woodbury or Pitman and we passed by a circus. I clearly recall a lighted midway and the lights from above the sidewalls of the big top and people moving about. "That's your Uncle Joe's show," father told us, "but we're not going in." Father didn't believe in "free rolling" even when it was his own brother's show.

Another year in the late 1930s a very small circus titled Roberts Bros. came to Haddon Heights. I biked over, stood around and watched. I recall they had dogs, goats and ponies and at least one white horse. No elephants! But I do recall someone asking me if I was interested in carrying water for the stock to earn a ticket. I understand the show was owned and managed by Robert Vanderbeek of Somerville, New Jersey and that his top was from Joe second hand. Not only that, but I'm told that same top became the first one used by Jack and Jake Mills.

That was the only circus I ever saw in my hometown. But there's a story about Joe and his circus (I don't know which one or what year) and the Borough of Haddon Heights, New Jersey. Joe tried to book his show and ran into what he considered a request for a payoff somewhere along the line. He could be very outspoken and he called it for what it was and wouldn't have any part of it. Maybe he mentioned my father, I don't know. Father was in local politics, veterans' groups, etc., and had run for public office and lost. Nevertheless, he was an influence in the town. Well, Joe came to father and told him with feeling what he thought of the situation. Father tried to arrange for the needed permits but was unable to resolve the matter. Finally, he appeared before the Borough Council and expressed his view but, again, to no avail. Wonder what the Roberts show had to do to play the town?

In his later years, Joe Conway leased and managed a number of different movie houses in the Philadelphia area, his last venture being an art house presenting the best of the imported European films to a West Philadelphia audience.

Most of what I know of the Reo Bros. and Dix Bros. circuses came to me years ago from Uncle Ru, with some bits and pieces from Oscar Decker, James M. Cole and others. Cousin Jim and Aunt Mary Alice Conway confirm the accuracy of the information in this article.

Through the kindness and understanding of my aunt, partially as the senior male in the family and partially because of my abiding interest in everything to do with circuses, I have permission to use the Reo Bros. and Dix Bros. titles, letterheads, lithos, etc. I deeply appreciate this legacy.

# ONLY BIG SHOW COMING

## Chapter 6 Part One

By Orin C. King

# A Grand Autochthonic Collection

1884

Copyright 1988 Orin Cople King

James T. Johnson spent the winter in Neosho Falls, going forth now and then to entertain the nearby villages with dramatic productions or exhibitions of his Parlor Circus, but there is no report on his major activity until March 28, when the *Post* informed the world that, "Martell & Johnson are in St. Louis this week buying properties for their show. They expect to start out some time in May. These gentlemen are men of extensive experience in the show business. They say they will have one of the best wagon shows on the road."

What circumstances brought Martell and

ographs, heralds, etc., at a cost of about \$15,000.

In addition to the Martell and Johnson families, the show had contracts with Clarence Robinson, bareback rider and son of the great James Robinson, and a famous old clown, Pete Conklin. The season was scheduled to open in Neosho Falls April 26.

The *Allen County Courant*, Iola, April 24, published a warning to the world that, "Jas. T. Johnson, who is connected with a Neosho Falls circus called Martell's is a first class dead beat. Papers making advertising con-

who was mentioned three times in the ad as "The only lady living who slides from the dome of the canvas to the ground suspended by the hair." The name of Clarence Robinson was set in the largest type.

Miss Kent also hung by her hair as she descended the wire outside the tent in the twice-a-day free act.

It was nearly certain that "EARTH DOES NOT FURNISH ITS EQUAL." Admission, 50 cents; children under 10, 25 cents.

Show day in Neosho Falls was difficult. The *Post* reported that, "The wind, blowing almost a hurricane, broke one of the center poles, so that their fastenings were of little account, and it was almost impossible to keep the tent standing." In spite of the weather, "The circus, last Saturday, was one of the best we have ever had in Neosho Falls."

The first road date was Monday, April 28,

This full page ad for the Martell show appeared in the April 26 issue of the *Neosho Falls Post*. Kansas State Historical Society.

**WANTED FOR**  
**JAS. T. JOHNSON & HARRY MARTELL'S**  
**CONSOLIDATED SHOWS,**  
NOW ORGANIZING FOR THE COMING SEASON OF 1884,  
to travel by wagon—People in all branches of the Circus Business, such as Bicyclists, Roller-skaters, or any Novelty that can be done in the ring or on stage. Wanted—Two good round-top Canvases, with middle-places, in good order, with Seats and Jacks for the same. Lights, etc.; two Bands, 6 to 8 mouthpieces, with good, responsible American Leaders; and Sideshow Property, with Tents, and Freaks of Nature of all kinds, Door-solicitors, etc. Also want to purchase one African male Lion and two Hyenas, or any other rare specimen of Animals, at reasonable figures for cash. Wanted—Two good Chandler-men, who understand Kid's lights. Must be sober men, or no go; a good, number one Advance-agent, who understands the Western country, and who can give good references; and 10 Billposters, who are up in the business. All privileges are for sale, outside and inside. Everything goes with this show this season. One Aerial Bicycle wanted immediately. Show Property of all kinds wanted. Address immediately  
JOHNSON & MARTELL'S CONSOLIDATED SHOWS, Box 11, Neosho Falls, Kan.  
47-11

Johnson and Martell ran this ad in the *Clipper* early in 1884. Van Matre collection.

Johnson together are unknown, nor is there any indication of a partnership between them. Harry Martell was head of a family of better than average performers, particularly outstanding as bicyclists, although like nearly all other circus performers they were skilled in a number of turns. Johnson had long been in management, but in addition led his family of wife and two daughters in exhibitions of roller skating, acrobatics, wire walking and bareback riding. He was also skilled in the management of gamblers, fakirs and general grifters. Johnson had the ability to move a show, put it up, take it down and move it again in the face of climatological, social or financial adversity.

A third member of the organization, a man of whom nothing is known, Mr. Bluhdorn, shared ownership with Martell. An extensive story in the *Post*, April 11, stated that Johnson would be the manager of the two-ring show.

A ton of paper arrived April 4 and the advance crew under the direction of Sam Lent papered the town. It was reported that the season would require at least ten tons of lith-

tracts had better look a 'leedle oud."

A full-page ad in the *Post* heralded the season's opener of Martell & Co's. Great Consolidated Two-Ring Shows, which, of course, was "THE LARGEST OF ALL." Named as performers were the Holmes Bros., double trapeze; Mollie and Ella (Johnson) with their trick ponies, January and Lillie; five clowns lead by Peter Conklin; the Martell Family, Eight in Number, acrobats and bicyclists, offering a \$10,000 Challenge to the World; 6 The Johnsons 6--six in the ads, four in the ring--roller skaters; Alfred Ray who was covered with scales instead of skin; Harme and Harrison, fearless snake charmers; Miss Ella Johnson; Queen of the Ring, in a daring Spanish Ring Act; 2 Great Orchestral Bands 2, under the direction of Prof. E. L. Graves; Miss Carrie Kent

**THE LARGEST OF ALL!**  
**MARTELL & CO.'S**  
GREAT CONSOLIDATED  
**TWO-RING SHOWS.**

SOLE PROPRIETOR  
GEN. CONTRACTING AGENT

—EARTH DOES NOT FURNISH ITS EQUAL—



**MARTELL FAMILY**  
EIGHT IN NUMBER.  
SIX CLowns 6  
5 CLowns 5

Myriads of Wild Beasts  
A Wilderness of Birds  
An Army of Monkeys  
The Lions from Numidia  
Tigers of Bengal

**HOLMES BROS.**  
Double Trapeze Act  
MISS CARRIE KENT



**Wild and Ferocious ANIMALS**  
Don't miss it  
Always the BEST.  
BETTER THAN SPEAR.

**Clarence Robinson,**



**Free Exhibition, MISS KENT**



**ALFRED RAY**  
The only lady living who slides from the dome of the canvas to the ground suspended by the hair.

**TO THE PUBLIC:** The proprietors of this magnificent Entertainment and only in which there have been no deaths or injuries, and they are aware of the fact that they have the most complete and perfect of the season, and that they are the only show of the kind in the West. They are the only show of the kind in the West. They are the only show of the kind in the West.

Will exhibit at Neosho Falls, Saturday, April 26, 1884. ADMISSION 50 CENTS. **MARTELL & CO.**

at Colony. The advance crew papered the town on the 16th and arranged two insertions advertising the coming extravaganza in the Colony *Free Press*. The *Press* ran a handout on the 24th.

It is interesting to note that "gift shows" when exhibiting in their home town did not take advantage of their friends and neighbors, the people they lived with five months of the year, but the rules changed quickly when the show entered the next town. The *Post* in Neosho Falls had nothing to complain about, but not so the Colony *Free Press*.

"Of all the snide shows that ever struck a community, 'Martell's Grand Consolidated Two-Ring Shows' is the worst we ever saw. It is a grand consolidation of the worst dead-beats, swindlers, thieves and libertines that could be got together. It was a good thing that the day was a bad one, for it kept people from attending the show and getting swindled. In fact, they showed nothing that they advertised; the only good thing about the whole business being the bicycle riding by Martell. Their 'two rings' dwindled down to one little 8 x 10 ring, and the riding was a disgrace to the 'profession.' We hope it will be a long time before Colony is disgraced by another outfit like Martell's."

The exhibitions at Le Roy, April 29, according to the *Reporter*, were, "As a whole exceedingly thin, but in part it was first class. The trapeze performances were as fine as we ever saw, the riding was good, considering the green horse, the bicycle riding was excellent. The music was good too. That is all."

Added to the advertising for Colony was John Webber, "the Graceful Indian Club Swinger."

Martell & Company played Burlington on April 30, but the *Independent* ignored the show except to say, "The circus and soap man have come and gone and still some people are not happy. There have always been, and we presume always will be, people, in the world who can never be satisfied."

What the *Independent* was referring to will be never be known.

Something happened at Burlington, although there is no mention of it in the local press. Accounts from other towns in the area indicate, but not directly, that the evening exhibition at Burlington was the final performance of Martell and Company, yet, this may not be true, because of a gap in the routing.

Dunlap, May 6: Council Grove, May 7; and Parkerville, May 8, were all posted by the billing crew but the exhibitions were never given.

The Neosho Falls *Post*, May 2, carried the following: "Mr. James T. Johnson, Circus Manager, withdrew from Martell & Co's show on account of some disagreement best known to himself and family. He says if he

## COMING! IN ALL ITS GRANDEUR!

**JAS. T. JOHNSON & CO'S**  
**Great Western Circus, Museum, Menagerie & Aquarium of Wonders.**  
**Two Great Shows Combined in One.**  
**Earth Does not furnish its Equal!**



Will Exhibit at Lyons, Wednesday

Johnson used this ad for the July 30 stand in Lyons, Kansas. Kansas State Historical Society.

organizes again he will do so with himself as partner. We wish him success, as he has been quite a benefit to Neosho Falls in fitting up the other show; so he will be, no doubt, should he organize another one."

The *Le Roy Reporter*, May 10, gives us our last glimpse of the ill-fated show. "Martell & Co's great two ring circus is busted. Two boxcars, passing east over the Missouri Pacific the other day, contained all there was left of the wonderful combination."

It was not the end for the Martell Family act which continued to perform on their bicycles for many years on some of the nation's largest shows.

\*\*\*\*\*

Johnson lost no time in beginning the organization of his new show in Neosho Falls. On May 16, the *Post* reported that, "James T. Johnson is fitting up a show which he expects to put on the road about the 1st of June."

One of the earliest arrivals for the new show was a young crocodile, eight feet long, which the expressman delivered on May 17.

A help wanted ad appeared in the *Post*, June 6. "Wanted, for Jas. T. Johnson's Show, two young ladies. One with long hair, for the Museum; and one to learn two acts for the ring. Also candy stands inside and outside; and reserved seats for rent. Apply soon to James T. Johnson or Box 11, Neosho Falls, Kan."

The fitting-out of the new show took long-

er than the June 1 estimate, but announcement of the first performances was made June 20.

Martell and Company had opened its season with a full page ad in the *Post*, but James T. Johnson & Co's Great Western Circus, Museum and Aquarium of Living Wonders depended on two small paragraphs in the news columns of the *Post*.

The season began Saturday, June 28, in Neosho Falls. The day before the exhibitions the *Post* expressed the hope that, "Mr. Johnson will be surprised by the large turn out that will be given him. He well deserves it, and as we all wish him success, we should give his show a big send off. So let us all join hands and give him 25 cents for the main show and 15 cents for the museum."

After the show had left town, the *Post* reported that, "Johnson's Show gave two entertainments here last Saturday to fair houses. Considering all the circumstances, they gave quite a good entertainment."

Despite the assertion of the *Post* that, "Several of our merchants were so pleased with Johnson's show that they followed it to Yates Center," one finds it difficult to believe. More likely, the merchants wanted to be sure of collecting money due them.

A small display ad appeared in the Yates Center *News* for the exhibitions of June 30. In the news columns were short messages like the following: "Prince DeFelmont will create more fun and laughter than you ever saw before, at the Great Western Circus, June 30th. Come and see the only living crocodile from the river Nile now in captivity with James T. Johnson & Co's Great Western Circus. Don't fail to see the great free outside ascension, which will positively take place, regardless of the weather, every afternoon and evening, by the little midgets, the Johnson sisters, at the Great Western Circus, June 30th."

In reviewing the show, the *News* commented on the good business done at both performances: "The little girls, Ella and Mollie, are a show within themselves and one appearance is worth the price of admission. Mr. Johnson has seen many ups and downs, too frequently the latter, for financial success, is an excellent manager and has good prospects now for getting beyond the timber. He allows no burns, gamblers or dead beats to follow his company or hang around his place of exhibition and if there can be such an institution as a moral circus Jim Johnson has it. The price of admission is 25 cents and the entertainment is well worth the money and more with it. We hope to hear in the fall that Johnson has enjoyed a prosperous season."

"The World-Renowned New Orleans Minstrels will give an entertainment at the close of Johnson's great show," reported the Augusta *Southern Kansas Gazette* prior to the appearance in that city on July 19, but made no mention of the show after the exhibitions.

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vertising car No. 2 came in on the Santa Fe. E. H. Davis, general agent, and Ora Ensminger, in charge of the billposters, did their duty in Topeka and moved on to Lawrence.

Boyd and Cole's advertising crew, were back in Topeka on April 6, and the next day covered every square inch that had escaped them in March.

Cole's advertising car No. 2, Ed H. Modigan in charge, was back in Topeka, April 19, putting up new paper in opposition to Doris.

Louis Cooke, an agent of Cole's, took a reporter from the Topeka *Commonwealth* on a tour of car No. 1. The reporter ran his story on Tuesday, April 8: "Every season for the past five or six years it has been the pleasure of *Commonwealth* reporters to visit, look through and write up circus advertising cars, but nothing of that kind ever stood on a side track in Topeka that was more elegant, convenient and attractive than car No. 1 of W. W. Cole's great show which arrived here Sunday at noon and remained until 12:30 last night, before it was hooked onto the hind end of a Union Pacific passenger train and went west. In interior dimensions the car is 9 by 54 feet and the same height as an ordinary sleeper, and is divided into three apartments. One of these is the private office of Mr. Cooke, the agent, which he has fitted up regardless of expense. Another contains the berths for the paste brigade to sleep, and the third is devoted to a steam heating apparatus, where the paste is made and the tools are carried. The exterior of the car is most gorgeously illustrated with circus scenes, and as it travels through the country attracts a great deal of attention."

The Topeka *State Journal*, April 24, reported that, "Four horsemen, three of them in yellor (sic) decorated uniforms, rode through the streets of the city, this morning, and succeeded in attracting considerable notice. The three in yellor were buglers, and now and then would toot out a martial strain. The intervals were improved by the plainly dressed horseman in announcing, in a regular fog horn voice that Cole's great show will be here next Tuesday. Oh newspaper publishers: what impositions are imposed on ye by the wiley show advertiser."

The *Commonwealth*, May 3, tersely commented that, "The Doris bugle brigade was in town yesterday."

The *Journal* on April 26 reported that, "Car No. 5 of the John B. Doris' monster show, came in last evening, and the city was rebilled and lithographed today. Doris is said to have the best ring show on the road." Early Monday morning car No. 5 moved on to Leavenworth.

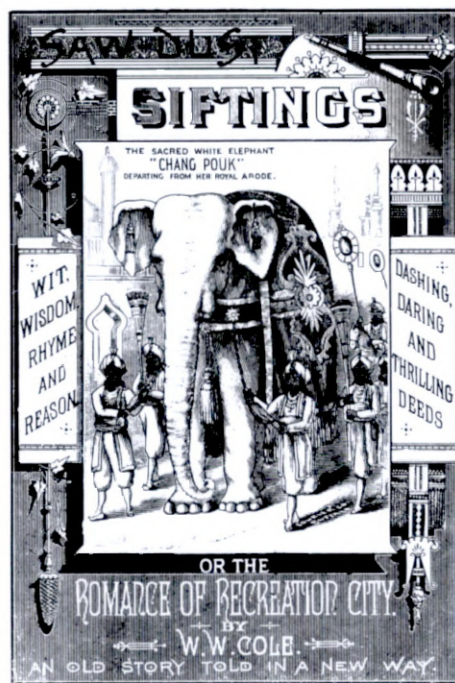
"Car No. 5" was not the fifth car in Doris' advance organization, but was a number selected to inflate the show's size and impress the public. A show requiring five advertis-

ing cars would be a monster show of unprecedented dimensions, but the effect could be promoted with only a few cents worth of paint on the side of a railroad car. Doris took the cheap way.

The duties of R. S. Wires, "confidential agent of W. W. Cole" are unknown, but the *Journal* recognized his presence at the Windsor Hotel on the 21st.

The shows fared equally in the number of handouts run in the Topeka papers, each with nine stories. The Cole show placed three in the *Journal*; two in the *Commonwealth*; and four in the *Capital*. Doris scored with one each in the *Journal*, *Commonwealth* and North Topeka *Mail*; and six in the *Capital*.

Advertising dollars did not always reap a bonus of promotional stories. The Cole show ran six ads in the *Journal*, but the paper carried only three handouts, whereas the *Capital* published four handouts but carried only three ads. The *Commonwealth* with three ads ran but two handouts.



W. W. Cole featured his white elephant, Chang Pouk, on the cover of his 1884 courier. Pfening Archives.

The discrepancy between paid ads and handouts was more pronounced in the Doris promotion. The *Journal* carried four ads but only one handout. The *Commonwealth* and the *Mail* each carried two ads and one handout. The *Capital*, which plugged the show most vigorously with six handouts, bore only three advertisements.

If one subscribed to the *Weekly Commonwealth* or the *Capital*, one could see at the Cole show, 45 acts; but if one took the *Journal* one could see 60 acts, plus a 100 cage menagerie.

Except for Mlle. Aimie, The Human Fly, all of Cole's performers were anonymous, a fact which prevented swollen heads and larger salaries, and made possible the easy and inexpensive substitution of one actor for another.

In his advertisements Cole exclaimed greedily that, "The Amusement World Is Mine!" Featured in the newspaper ads were "12 GENUINE BEDOUINS FRESH FROM THE SOUDAN"; a herd of performing elephants; roller skaters; "7 SISTERS WITH HAIR 7 FT LONG"; a gallery of wax statuary; bareback riders; a "whole HORSE FAIR OF SUPERB THOROUGHBREDS; Aerial Bicycle Riding;" Chang Pouk, "The Sacred White Elephant of Burmah; secured at an expense of \$100,000"; and Samson, "the largest Elephant alive."

Cole arrived in Topeka about eight o'clock in the morning, April 29. The lateness was due to the Cole train being held at Grantville seven miles east of Topeka to allow the "plug" to pass on its way to Kansas City.

Once the train arrived at the Union Pacific depot, according to the *Mail*, "an army of supes went to work taking the cages and wagons from the cars, in the presence of a crowd of hundreds of idlers and children. By ten o'clock Kansas Ave. on the south side (of the Kansas river) was thronged with people, the sidewalks and windows being filled. The parade did not take place till half past twelve and the crowd was tired. The procession was far from imposing. The crowds at the circus both day and night were large. The entertainment contained some novelties among which was the walking head downward of a female trapezist on an improvised ceiling, some artistic roller skating, and the riding of a bicycle across a wire."

The *Journal* did not review the show and was content to remark that, "Ed Berry, the detective with Cole's show, is an old Topeka boy, well remembered by many here."

The *Capital* expressed its displeasure with the Cole show in a forthright manner: "The delay (late arrival) caused a corresponding delay in the street parade. Thousands of men, women and children lined the principal thorough-fares, but as the parade was only made around three blocks, the majority of the people did not see it. The performance was very slim, and but few, if any, new or original features were introduced. The riding was even behind the age, and all in all, it was not as good as advertised by a large majority. The tendency to cut short every act and rush things through was plainly noticeable, especially in closing up the menagerie before time was given half the people to view the wonders. Cole will have to accommodate his patrons more generally that is certain."

Cole, apparently, had a "public be damned" attitude.

The *Commonwealth* had a few comments to make after Cole had come and gone.

"The City Marshal of Leavenworth was in

WITHOUT A RIVAL—RECOGNIZING NO EQUAL.



## SALLIE MARKS ELLA STOKES

THE EXCEPTIONABLY ELEGANT  
EMPRESS OF THE ARENA

Pleasing, Popular, Prettiest, Petite  
**PRINCESS OF THE ARENA**

This beautiful and charming young Equestrienne has most deservedly earned her well-earned laurels. Gifted with exquisite and delicate beauty of both face and figure, that need no embellishment that comes from within the art itself, she is at the same time endowed with tremendous strength and poise, and with a daring that knows no bounds, and is incomparably graceful and daring in

—HER FLIGHTS UPON—

**HER SUPERB BARE-BACK STEED**  
HER RIDING IS THE VERY  
**Acme of Female Equestrianism**

And the embodiment of youthful beauty, grace and suppleness. People praise her without stint, and more than all others, she is the People's Favorite.

ELLA STOKES

IN THE  
**Premiere Bare-Back Equestrienne**  
OF THE WORLD.

This brilliantly beautiful young lady will positively appear in each and every performance, and thus we thousands who consider her riding alone a whole show in itself.

Every Riding Act in the Great International, Largest and Best Show on Earth, is performed upon Bare-back Horses. The big, awkward Pad, Saddle or Platform, used by most Riders, is something unknown about the premises. MISS STOKES, therefore, disdain using one, and actually accomplishes more upon her Bare-back Horse, than other Equestriennes do upon their Platformed Horses.

Bareback riders Sallie Marks and Ella Stokes were listed in the 1884 courier of the Doris show. Pfening Archives.

the city yesterday looking at the show crowd. They are soon to visit his city.

"The city got \$160 out of W. W. Cole for license—\$150 for the circus and \$10 for the sideshow.

"The circus waxed and waned as quietly as could be hoped. Very few disturbances or depredations reported.

"Tuesday night, at the circus grounds, Henry Calcote, an old man from Valley Falls, was knocked senseless with a tent pole. Before the crowd got out of the way the circus hands commenced taking down the tents, and seems that one of them fell, striking Mr. Calcote." The Valley Falls newspapers failed to pick up the story.

The final paragraph was an accusation that was frequently directed toward circuses, often unjustly.

"Cole's circus, considering the time it has been on the road this season, is said to have congregated as grand an array of 'crooks' as the most exacting might wish. Among them was Tracy and his following, but it is said they made little effort to 'work' this town, probably because the boys were 'onto the outfit.' It is further intimated that the regular circus detective was in with this class, and that on reaching town he ascertained who our officers were, and at once pointed them out to the 'gang.'"

John B. Doris refused to be intimidated by the wealth of W. W. Cole, or his reputation

as a showman. Whatever Cole had, Doris had more. Cole had a \$100,000 white elephant; Doris paid \$110,000 for his. Cole had 12 performing Arabs; Doris had 14 "real brawny turks." Cole had a troupe of "artistic roller skaters;" but Doris had "Siberian Roller Skaters." In the final comparison, Doris was forced to admit that he had "The Largest Show on Earth," a confession which appeared in the *Mail*, April 24.

The Santa Fe brought the Great Inter-Ocean from Atchison at a cost of \$800, according to the *Capital*. "Of this amount \$700 was for risks in carrying." On arrival 43 circus people registered at the Windsor hotel.

The *Commonwealth* reviewed the show following the exhibitions of Friday, May 9: "Previous to Mr. Doris' advent hither a few, hot-headed spirits conspired to create a prejudice against him and thus keep people away from his attraction by preaching that W. W. Cole had

been the first here; that W. W. Cole is a man worth \$8,000,000, therefore could not help having the best show on earth, and that if his was rotten, as those claimed who said it, Mr. Doris' would be worse. But the people came all the same to see for themselves and be convinced. If they had any doubts previously in favor of Cole, these were quickly dispelled when Mr. Doris' 10 o'clock parade appeared upon the streets. That was so much finer, grander and more extensive than Cole's that an attempt to compare the two would be mockery. The performances given, both afternoon and evening, were also first-class, and included everything that had been advertised in advance. It would not be exaggerating, either, to say that they offered many admirable features not advertised, and the show was as well patronized as the management expected. If fact, they left this morning for Lawrence, feeling flattered with Topeka. Among some of the many acts performed in two rings worthy of mention, was the bareback riding by Mr. Wm. Showles. This young man is a marvellous expert in his line of business and executed several of the most daring and dangerous feats yesterday ever seen here. Taking into consideration the fact that Mr. Showles is but twenty-two years of age, he is justly entitled to the claim that he is the champion of the world. The bareback riding by Ella Stokes and Sallie Marks was likewise an exhibition of grace and skill, attained by few people who attempt it.

"So was the trapeze performance; the 'Slide for Life' of Mlle. Josephine; the flying Tings, on which Mlle. Lizette created some

startling sensations; the bicycle riding of Salbinis' troupe; the Siberian roller skaters and everything offered, highly appreciated.

"The men working for Mr. Doris are all gentlemanly and accommodating in their bearing towards patrons, which is a feature that is bound to have its good effect. It would not be doing a very worthy and hard-working press agent justice if we should cut this notice off without saying something about Mr. John E. Boyle. This young man knows how to be a press agent, and Mr. Doris is to be congratulated at having secured his services. Mr. Boyle, however, is an old hand at the business, having traveled for Brooks & Dixon, the dramatic managers, several years.

"Mr. Doris and his show will always be welcomed in Topeka."

The *Mail* reported that, "Doris' circus gave two exhibitions in Topeka last Friday, and all who went said they thought the performances much better than Cole's. There is a bitter rivalry between the two show, which appears to have been started by the Cole show. However, both are good enough."

A circus season in northeastern Kansas surpassing that of 1884 is beyond imagining. The five greatest shows in America scrambled for every half dollar in the most populous part of Kansas, and each of the contestants was a fierce competitor.

Topeka: Cole April 29, Doris May 9, Sells September 11, Forepaugh July 30, Barnum October 2. Lawrence: Cole May 3, Doris May 10. Leavenworth: Cole May 5, Doris May 7, Barnum October 1. Atchison: Cole May 6, Doris May 8, Sells May 27, Forepaugh July 28, Barnum September 30. St. Joseph: Missouri May 7, Doris May 6, Barnum September 29. Kansas City?: Doris May 5 Barnum October 3.

The Topeka dates for Cole and Doris generated some warmth, but the time between the exhibitions was sufficient to restrict the fire. The week between the Lawrence appearances, also, diluted the virulence of the attacks. The warfare at St. Joseph, Missouri, with Cole coming the day after Doris must have stirred a hornet's nest, but the Missouri papers are not available in Topeka. Hard words passed between the shows at Leavenworth, but the vituperation reached a peak in Atchison.

The exchange of adjectives between the two shows for the Leavenworth exhibitions began in the *Times* on April 20, when handouts from each of the aggregations appeared on the same page, side by side. Doris, under a headline proclaiming "A Greater Than Barnum's" [sic] gave a brief description of acts to be seen, which included everything offered by Cole, although Cole was not mentioned. Early in the story Doris revealed that his was "the largest railway show on earth."

A longer story, running a column and a half with six illustrations, quoted from the

St. Louis *Republican*, was purportedly an interview with Cole prior to the opening of the 1884 season. The handout was headed "ALMOST EVERYTHING. THAT IS, EVERYTHING WORTH SEEING OR WORTH HEARING." Cole claimed a relationship between capital, the daily nut, and the number and quality of attractions the show provided, and since the capital had been "increased to over \$2,000,000 in round figures and a daily expense of \$3,500, it needs no further proof to convince you that no other show of such tremendous and astonishing proportion has been seen since the creation of the world. Not only in magnitude, but in merit, is this literally true.

"I shall give nearly three times as much 'show' as any other organization in existence," Cole boasted, "and it will be necessary for visitors to attend at least two performances if they wish to see it all."

Cole's handout was decorated with charming little cuts depicting "Russian Roller Skaters," brawny Arabs, pig-riding monkey jockeys, the "Sacred White Elephant" properly robed, the human fly and "Aerial Bicycle Riders."

On Sunday morning, May 4, the day before Cole's exhibition, the front page of the *Times* ran a scorching handout provided by the Doris press department. The headline for the story was as direct an assault as could be devised.

"Be Cautious. A Damnable Fraud is Upon You. A Combination of Thieves, Pickpockets and Three Card Monte Men. What the Press has to say About W. W. Cole's Rotten Concern."

The story carried "quotes" from the *Kansas City Journal*, *Kansas City Brease* (sic), *Kansas City Star* and the *Topeka Dailey Capital*.

The *Journal*, April 29, was brief. "Cole's circus was not as good last year.

"Cole's Circus exhibited here today and was considered by all who witnessed that performance a very snide affair, and the worst ever seen in this city. There are twenty-eight desperate thieves who travel with this show--consisting of fakirs, candy butchers, pickpockets, sneak thieves and villains of the deepest dye, each of whom pay Mr. Cole \$50 per week each and one-half of their ill-gotten gains, for the privilege of protection against arrest."--*Kansas City Brease* (sic), April 28.

The *Star*, April 28, was quoted as saying, "A large number of confidence men, fakirs and thieves of high and low degree traveling with the Cole show are making themselves busy about the city. The gang is tough and would resort to any low unprincipled act to rob and plunder."

In quoting the *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 30, Doris abbreviated the account of the show's arrival and parade. The quote used in the *Times* follows: "W. W. Cole ar-

rived here (Topeka) yesterday at 8 a.m. The parade amounted to nothing. The performance was very slim and but few, if any, new original features were introduced. The riding was behind the age, and all in all it was not as good as advertised by a large majority. Mr. Cole will have to accommodate his patrons in a different manner."

The *Capital* did not report that "the parade amounted to nothing," but did express dissatisfaction because the spectacle was "only made around three blocks." The final sentence is a paraphrase of the *Capital*, but does represent accurately the view of the Topeka paper.

The authenticity of the *Kansas City* quotes cannot be verified in Topeka, but that part of the *Capital* report beginning with, "The performance was very slim," is quoted exactly as it appeared in the *Capital*.

In the same issue of the *Leavenworth Times*, May 4, Cole made a few accusations of his own, devoting half of his advertisement to an attack on Doris.

"I will refer you to the published bill of sale of the little Doris Circus for an exact inventory of everything that he exhibits. He does not own it, as it is in the hands of his lenient creditors. Finally and frankly I will say: Mr. Doris, your Little Circus is Doomed to an Early Death! from the fact that you Advertise Everything and exhibit little or nothing!

"There is no Two-Headed Lady in the Doris Circus, yet such an attraction is boldly advertised.

"There are no Turks in the Doris Circus, but you will see white men painted and palmed off as such.

"There are no Russian Athletes in the Doris Circus, although they are a principal feature on the bills.

"There is no White, Sacred, or Albino Elephant in the Doris Circus as no animal of any kind has been purchased by Mr. Doris in 2 years.

"There is no Herd of Elephants in the Doris Circus. He has just two very ordinary ones.

"There is no Bovalapus in the Doris Circus. A common buffalo cow is all he has.

"There are no Lion Slayers in the Doris Circus. Two Moon-faced monkeys are the stock in trade.

"There are no New Features in the Doris Circus. Every act is old and can be seen in any show.

"There is nothing great about the Doris Circus except its Indebtedness. Its people are ill-paid, ill-provided; its horses are ill-kept, ill-fed, ill-looking; its managers ill-advised financial wrecks.

"A CHALLENGE TO SUCH A DILAPIDATED CONCERN would be worse than 'fool's folly.' At one time I offered to loan Mr. Doris \$10,000 (to

cover one of my deposits inviting him to an open comparison), and take a mortgage on his show for the amount, but that time has passed. The show is now out of his hands and beyond his control, 'as attests the annexed bill of sale,' etc. However, I will donate \$10,000 to any charitable society in Leavenworth, that the Mayor and three other responsible citizens may select, if all that I have stated above is not 'AS TRUE AS SCRIPTURE.' Very respectfully, W. W. COLE, Proprietor of the Great Cole Shows."

The day following Cole's exhibition the *Times* ran a review, undoubtedly written by C. Maxwell, press agent on duty at Leavenworth, for only a press agent would write, "There is only one word in the English language that will describe this wonderful exhibition, and that is perfection."

The final paragraph could have been added by the editor stating, "The stormy weather last night prevented many from being present to see the entertainment, but Mr. Cole lost nothing by his visit to Leavenworth." In another column it was reported that, "No robberies were reported by the police last night."

Doris exhibited in Leavenworth, Wednesday, May 7, and in the opinion of the *Times*, "It is the best show that has been in Leavenworth for years."

"In the morning the weather was rainy and dismal and the tents were placed at Cherokee and Twelfth streets, two blocks away from

Johnny Patterson sold this clown songster on the Doris show during the 1884 season. Pfening Archives.



the ground first selected. Notwithstanding all this every seat under the canvas was filled during the afternoon performance, and the weather clearing up a little toward evening brought the people out so that there was scarcely standing room at night.

"The performance was in fact better than it had been advertised. Every act was clean, graceful, attractive. The gems of the show are the baby bicycle rider who has no equal, W. Showles, the champion bareback rider and his graceful dappled gray horse, Mlle. Lyzette and Mlle. Millet in their flying rings.

"Riffa Bey in his blood curdling, knife throwing. There were many other attractions least of not which is a corps of gentlemanly attaches prominent among whom is John E. Boyle, press agent. Mr. Doris may well feel proud of his show, not only of the attractions of the arena but his splendid collection of rare animals exhibited in the menagerie. Should the Doris show ever come to Leavenworth again, and it is hoped it will, the management will do well to have a larger canvas, for it is the best show that has been in Leavenworth for years."

The date for the first posting of the Atchison billboards is unknown, but on April 14, Cole fired the first salvo in the newspapers with an advertisement in the Atchison *Globe*. Doris' agents arrived on the 25th and the battle was joined.

The *Globe* reported an interesting situation, April 26. "The advertising cars of both the Doris (sic) and Cole circuses arrived in Atchison last night, and were given track room near the union depot. Twice the usual amount of money is being expended in advertising, especially in the country. The Doris car is in charge of Geo. Kettler and the Cole gang is headed by E. H. Madigan."

The *Globe* consistently spelled Doris with two "r's."

E. S. Wires, representing the Cole show, was in Atchison on the 29th "working up a special scheme." Also in town for the Cole show was Louis E. Cooke who apparently was on duty in Atchison until the show had come and gone.

"Mild-mannered Mr. Cooke, general representative of the Cole show, was at the St. James yesterday," according to the *Globe*, May 1. "On occasion Mr. Cooke can swear worse than a pirate; so we are informed by a gentleman who recently rubbed him the wrong way."


The *Globe*, also on May 1, reported that, "Sam Joseph, general representative of the Sells circus, which will pitch its tents in Atchison on the 27th of May, is in the city. Mr. Joseph will do a great job of advertising, to counteract that already done by Cole and Doris."

To further confuse the public was an announcement in the *Globe*, April 28, that Forepaugh had scheduled Atchison for an undesignated date.

Doris' bugle brigade appeared May 1, and distributed thousands of hand bills prompting the editor of the *Globe* to comment,

"The average circus advertiser seems to have a passion for distributing bills which the people do not read. The back alleys of Atchison are already knee deep with Cole and Doris bills; now comes Sells to cover up all the others. The man who distributes the

**TOO WHITE FOR BARNUM**



**FOREPAUGH'S REPLY TO BARNUM**

**FOREPAUGH'S SACRED WHITE ELEPHANT**

"LIGHT OF ASIA"

PROVED BY THE HIGHEST SCIENTIFIC AUTHORITY TO BE

**GENUINE**

**AND BARNUM'S SACRED WHITE ELEPHANT**

**AND ALL ITS SURROUNDINGS A RANK FRAUD.**

Adam Forepaugh issued this courier in 1884, as his reply to Barnum's claim that the "Light of Asia" was a fake. Pfening Archives.

most bills in a town is not the best advertiser by any means."

The columns of the *Globe* on Saturday, May 3, were full of circus bombast, accusations and counter-accusation. Doris ran the same piece he used in Leavenworth quoting the Kansas City and Topeka papers, and Cole published the same ad used in Leavenworth, explaining what a snide outfit the Doris show was.

A new element appeared in a column next to Cole's advertisement headed, "Wait for the Big Show." The "Big Show" was Sells Brothers' Monster Fifty Cage Menagerie and Great Four Ring Circus, "not coming until May 27th." The story, about a third of a column in length, made no mention of either Cole or Doris, but was devoted entirely to extolling the exalted merits of the Sells' show.

The *Globe* was harvesting a bonanza crop and bent over backwards not to offend any of the embattled shows, and on May 3, ran the following: "In this issue will be found special announcements from the three circuses which are to be in Atchison this month, and they are worth reading, for more spirited examples of literature have not appeared in these columns before in years. The *Globe* has no opinion to express with reference to the comparative merits of the three shows, but it is certain that all of them are represented by devilish good fellows. The result of the amusing war now in progress will be that all of the circuses will be well patronized, for the advance agents have created a desire on the part of the people to judge for themselves."

The *Globe* offered the opinion that in May the Missouri Pacific would "earn at least \$2,500 in hauling circuses."

The *Globe* also reminded its readers that the last time he appeared in Atchison [1883] Cole gave \$100 to the library fund.

The day before his exhibitions Cole denounced the tirade published by Doris quoting Kansas City and Topeka papers with a derogatory explanation of how the statements of "the little opposition show" were nothing more than the death throes of Mr. Doris' organization, which "is now floundering in the quagmire of Bankruptcy." Cole stated that the outlook for local bills against Doris "is exceedingly gloomy," meaning that local merchants were not likely to be paid for goods or services.

The editors of the *Globe* were embarrassed by Doris' accusations, describing the Cole show as "a combination of thieves, pickpockets and three carde monte men," and on the 5th of May ran the following explanation absolving themselves of complicity: "It is justly due to Mr. Cole to state that the article in reference to his show published in Saturday's *Globe* was a paid notice, prepared and contracted for by the agent of Mr. Doris. It was a regular advertisement over the signature of John B. Doris, and should be considered as such."

Farther down the column the *Globe* defended Cole more explicitly: "Statements to the effect that any circus proprietor encourages thieves and confidence men to follow in his train, and receives pay from them for a robbing privilege, are absurd. Thieves will be found wherever there is a crowd; at fairs, camp meeting and circuses alike, and a circus proprietor is no more responsible because bad men practice devilry in his audience than the ministers are responsible for the acts of rowdies who congregate at camp meetings. Fifteen fakirs came to town today, and were run out by the police, who never saw the show which is advertised for tomorrow. Circus day thefts are usually committed by local talent, and W. W. Cole employees have particular instructions to point out to the local police all suspicious characters."

Nearly every circus owner had his "boys" who would enforce the owner's wishes upon any one selected to be punished. Thanks to "goon squads" any gambler or fakir who appeared on the lot could depend on being roughed-up if the owner objected to his presence. No grifter could safely work the lot day after day without the consent of the owner. Indulgences were granted by the owner and paid for in cash. Otherwise the *Globe* was correct.

In the afternoon on show day, Cole appeared in the court of Justice Phelps in answer to a suit filed by several employees for wages. According to the *Globe*. "Mr. Cole said he was not aware of the men quitting, and would have paid them had they applied to him instead of the court. Mr. Cole produced a 'great roll,' as the late Mr. Mulvihill would say, and settled the bills, half of which went to the attorney who brought the suits. Mr. Cole, after paying the court fees, presented the justice with admission tickets, and left for the show grounds."

The *Globe*, on show day, reported that, "The Cole circus procession today was a glint, glitter and glamour affair, and entirely satisfactory to the immense crowds of people which lined the streets. The afternoon performance is in progress as we go to press, and the immense tents are packed."

Law and order in Atchison on May 6 was solidly supported by Marshal Barry, assisted by his special force, and advised by Detective Barry of the Cole show. Enforcement was covered by several short paragraphs in the *Globe*.

"Two smooth faced chaps were arrested on the circus grounds this afternoon for attempting to pick pockets, who were locked up, good clothes and all.

"The calaboose is filled with tramps, suspicious looking fellows, and bums. They will be dealt with in the morning, and disposed of before Thursday's crop [Doris] is gathered.

"Parties owning hogs, and permitting them to run at large, must pay a dollar each to get them out of the pound.

"Were we to find fault with W. W. Cole's tented exhibition," the *Globe* explained after the show had come and gone, "it would be that it lacks inside management. Mr. Cole has as many expensive features as any manager on the road, and plenty of fine horses and capable performers, but the programme is not rendered whit the snap and vim which a circus audience enjoys. It can be said of Mr. Cole that he shows features advertised, which can be said of no other circus proprietor of our acquaintance. Mlle. Aime walked head downward, precisely as promised, and there were a large number of equally astonishing acts, but we are satisfied that Mr. Cole needs an inside manager who will satisfy the people as well as Louis Cooke's outside management satisfies them."

Press agent C. Maxwell arrived with the

show and for a reason unexplained earned the displeasure of the *Globe*. "Cholley' Maxwell, press agent of Cole's show, should be salted without unnecessary delay; he is entirely too fresh."

The animosity was still strong two days later when the *Globe* commented, "John E. Boyle, the press agent of the Doris show, earns his money; anyway he gets splendid

each wished the other success, and resolved to gut with a sharper knife in the future than ever before."

On Doris' show day the *Globe*, an afternoon paper, commented that, "Those Atchison people who imagined that John B. Doris operates a 'little show' were agreeably disappointed this morning with the procession, which was one of the finest ever seen in the streets of Atchison, as well as one of the most extensive.

"A great crowd followed the circus procession to the grounds this morning, where the usual free entertainment took place."

Following the departure of the Doris show, the *Globe* had much to say, and all of it flattering to the Great Inter-Ocean.

"The best thing about Wm. Showles, the champion bareback rider, is that he is not stuck on himself, as John Boyle expresses it. He is a very agreeable gentleman and was a caller at this office yesterday afternoon."

In a different column, "The Dorris (sic) circus performance last night was generally voted much the best ever seen in Atchison. The attendance was large, and we have never known a circus audience to exhibit more enthusiasm. The bareback riding of Wm. Showles; the bicycle performance of the Selbina family; the feats of two families of acrobats; the performance of the men of the air; the trained elephants, particularly the one which stepped over the man; the singing of the 'Jubes'; the knife throwing, etc., were unusual features. The show pulled out at 1 o'clock this morning, and the *Globe* has its advertising money, therefore we say to the newspapers of the surrounding country without prospect of reward or favor: Advise your readers to attend the Doris circus; it is the best traveling, although not as large as some of the others."

The rivalry between Cole and Doris continued, reaching a climax in Nebraska. Doris' billing crew, according to the North Topeka *Mail*, pasted the following on the side of a building: "Stop thief! Farmers stay home: A terrible pestilence is about to visit Nebraska City, May 12, 1884, in the shape of W. W. Cole's circus. Farmers, for God's sake remain at home. This show is composed of the worst and most desperate organized bands of thieves, cut-throats, plunderers and house-breakers. Protect your homes and barns, keep your guns loaded at home, for when they start out they present the appearance of blood-thirsty desperados. Don't leave your house on May 12."

In conclusion, the *Mail* remarked, "This didn't exactly please Mr. Cole, who caused the agents of the Doris show to be locked up in jail.

On Monday, June 2, Doris again faced opposition for his exhibitions at Washington, being the second show of the season. The opposition—if that can be considered a proper word for this instance—was the Great In-

The Only Big Show Coming to Fayette County This Year.

ORTON'S ANGLO-AMERICAN

## Circus and Menagerie!

Will Positively Appear at

WEST UNION,

TUESDAY, JULY 29, '84.

Travels by Its Own Special Train of Cars. Everything New and Bright.

THE MODEL SHOW OF THE WORLD:

Be in town early to witness the

GRAND STREET PARADE!

A Solid Mile of Golden Glitter.



31 Massive Dens of Brute Beasts.

The Whole World Contributing. 5 Open Dens in the STREET Parade. 7 World Renowned Lady Riders. 12 Famous & Famous Clowns. Performing Lions, Hyenas, Leopards and Camels.

HOC-HI, the Giant Cannibal Chief. FIVE GREAT GIANTS.

A Giant Horse, a Giant Camel, a Giant Emu, Giant Men and Women. The Greatest Riders. The Greatest Leapers. The Greatest Jugglers. The Greatest Equilibrista. The Greatest Performers. The Greatest Acrobats In The World.

The Big Anglo-American SHOW!

Requiring But ONE Simple Admission Ticket to Witness this Vast World of Wonders. Coming Sure for ONE DAY to

West Union, Iowa, July 29.

Orton's Anglo-American Circus used this ad in Iowa in July before coming to Kansas for dates in September 1884. Circus World Museum collection.

notices where Mr. Fresh Maxwell, of the big Cole show, gets left."

Cole played Atchison May 6, and Doris exhibited there May 8, but on the 7th the shows met in the East Atchison railroad yards.

The *Globe* reported, May 7, "This morning at four o'clock the Cole and Doris circus trains met in East Atchison, just beyond the bridge, the latter on its way to Leavenworth, and the former to St. Joe. During the delay of ten minutes Mr. Doris and Mr. Cole met on the platform of the Cole car, and talked very friendly and pleasantly. As they separated,

ternational and European circus, scheduled for Washington, Saturday, May 24.

The Great International played Clifton on May 22, and was reported by the *Atchison Globe*, the show being totally ignored by the *Clifton Review*.

"The Great International Circus, which is now touring the Central Branch [Missouri Pacific], carries all its paraphernalia in one box car. When the Pomeroy (Atchison coal merchant) pulled into Clifton, hundreds of people were at the depot waiting for the circus train, but the 'circus train' had been at the depot platform for an hour, though the people did not suspicion (sic) it."

On May 28, the *Globe* carried further information on the Great International: "During the performance of the International show in Clifton, a tough citizen by the name of Dave Martin raised a row with the showmen, and made assault upon them. Officer Thomas Duffy undertook to quiet Martin, when the latter turned on the officer and said: 'D\_n you I'll attend to your case.' The officer not desiring to raise a row, retreated backward, followed by Martin, who seized the officer by the throat, and began to strangle him. Again the officer tore loose and warned Martin to stand back. But with renewed frenzy Martin rushed upon the officer, who promptly fired on him, sending a ball through his heart. Martin fell and died in about fifteen minutes."

The *Clifton Review* carried the story of the shooting, but made no mention of the show grounds or the performance, or of the show, thereby casting a doubt on the story as reported by the *Globe*. The details were essentially the same in both reports, but according to the *Review*, the shooting was done by Tom Tuffley, who was immediately exonerated by a coroner's jury.

Advertising for the Great International in the *Washington County Register* consisted solely of a few short paragraphs appearing on show day, May 24: "The Great European show gives an entertainment in this city today."

"The International and great European Circus will exhibit here, Saturday, May 24, Admission, 25 cts."

"The International Circus consists of more arena acrobats and a greater diversity of popular and purer amusements than any other show. Admission 25 cts."

"No Sacred Elephant. The International Circus is commended by the press and public as the most complete amusement organization under one large pavilion; seating capacity for 5000 persons. Two performances daily at 2 and 7 p.m. Admission 25 cts. At Washington, May 24."

"No White Elephant, but more male and female riders, acrobats, gymnasts, barists, trapezists, Hindoo jugglers, Arab contortion-

ists, clown, leapers, tumblers, and a band of drilled musicians, performing horses, dogs, birds and monkeys. Saturday, May 24. Admission 25 cts. At Washington, Saturday, May 24."

The *Register* printed a review of the show, May 31: "The show last Saturday did not draw a very large crowd, although those who

On May 26, the Great International was doing business in Hanover, but in wonderment the Hanover *Democrat* remarked that, "The International was the first circus we have seen without horses."

There is no indication that the competition between Cole and Doris, and the vituperations flashing back and forth between them caused any loss of revenue to either show. If the proximity of Cole could not hurt John B. Doris, what then could he possibly fear from the Great International?

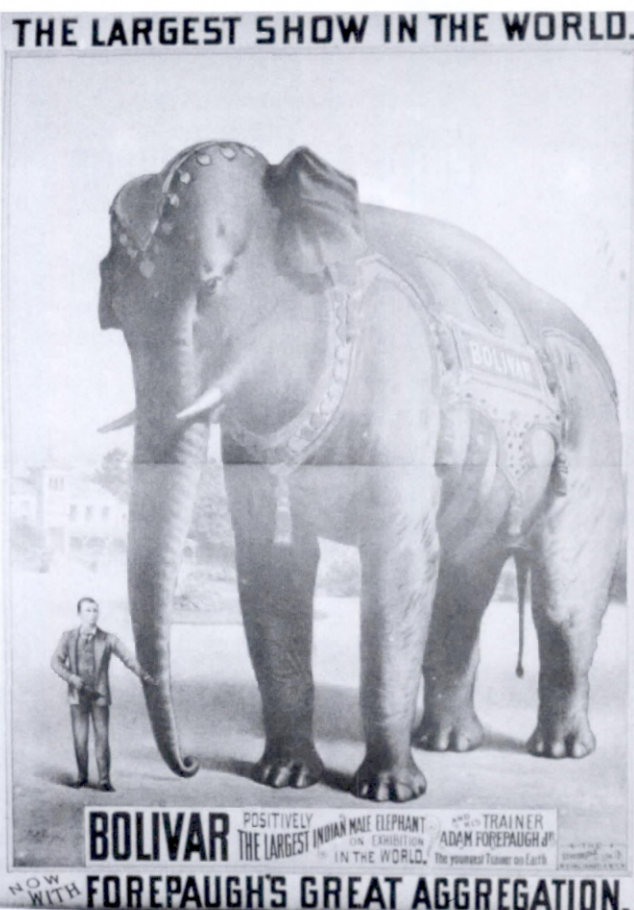
When Doris arrived in Humboldt for the exhibitions of May 14, the *Union* reported that, "Doris' show didn't arrive here till 6 o'clock a.m. The artist did not have time to whitewash the elephant."

"We [the *Union*] overheard a small boy remark, that the 'white sacred elephant looked like any other elephant.'"

Washington June 2 despite the opposition of the Great International, was for Doris, according to the *Republican*, "a success in every particular. The tents were crowded during the day, and moderately full at night. There were many interesting features with the show, in fact too many to attempt to enumerate; but we venture to say, that if the John B. Doris show comes to our city again, they will be well patronized."

In another column on page one, the *Republican* carried an account of a near catastrophe:

"A serious accident happened to the John B. Doris show just as they were leaving this city Monday night on the Central Branch road. The two hind cars of the second section of the show, were derailed close to the stock-chutes, but run along on the ties for some thirty or forty yards, and then plunged over an embankment of about eight feet, turning one car containing twenty-four horses, completely upside down. Strange to say, but one horse was killed--the white one ridden by one of the lady riders at the morning and evening entertainment. Several were injured, however, one valuable animal losing an eye. The other car was a sleeper, used by the tent and stockmen, and at the time of the accident was full of tired and sleepy laborers, who were thrown into confusion by the sudden landing of the car down the embankment. None were seriously hurt, however. The car containing the elephant was slightly damaged, and it was found necessary to unload this huge animal until safer quarters could be found. They showed in Beloit Tuesday."



Strobridge printed this lithograph for Adam Forepaugh in 1882 and it was used in 1884.

attended pronounced the performance as being very good. There were no animals as advertised and not a horse in the ring or elsewhere belonging to the great colossal. People generally got it into their heads that it was a sort of one-horse snide affair and that it was Doris' Great Show that they all wanted to see. There they were correct, as all should see Doris' performance in this city next Monday. There is no doubt but that he has the best and most wonderful aggregation of curiosities in America."

In a separate story the *Register* reported that, "The Great European and International circus went to pieces here last Sunday morning when the time for moving to Hanover came. We don't know what the trouble was, but be it what it may, four of the best performers, in fact all there was of the circus worth anything, and the troupe of performing dogs remained here."

On September 19, the day before Orton's Anglo-American was scheduled to play Washington, the *Republican* felt obligated to remind its readers of "how they were robbed and swindled by John B. Doris' show, and take warning therefrom."

The "swindle," as reported June 6, by the *Republican*: "A great many people were 'taken in' by the 60 cent ticket man at the circus, who kindly offers tickets for sale, at a bonus of ten cents, to those wishing to avoid the rush at the main ticket wagon. Beware of the first ticket man you come to at a circus."

The *Jewell County Monitor*, Mankato, speaking of the exhibitions given Thursday, June 5, reported that, "We have seen a good many circuses, but we never saw so many swindlers connected with one. It seemed as though every employee was delegated to work every game possible to beat the people, and it is astonishing to learn how many were taken in. We believe John B. Doris employs the largest gang of swindlers that ever traveled together."

Mankato's other paper, the *Review*, reported that, "The circus was well attended last Thursday, the crowd being estimated from six to eight thousand. While the show did not near 'fill the bills,' it was the best ever in this part of the State."

Cole was back in Kansas in the fall playing Fredonia on October 17, and Columbus October 18.

The *Wilson County Citizen*, Fredonia, observed that, "Last Friday, Cole's circus and menagerie attracted an immense crowd to Fredonia, many coming a distance of twenty miles. No circus ever called greater numbers of people to our town nor so many under its canvas. The parade in the forenoon was the best ever witnessed on our streets. The animal exhibition was quite large and very good. The wax statuary was unfaithful and poor. The performing of the elephants was a rare treat, while the clowns had little talent for their role. The feats on the trapeze, wire and other aerial parts were admirably executed. The horses were fine and their relation to the show is an important one."

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James A. Robinson, according to the *Commonwealth*, appeared in Topeka, June 21, 1884, as contracting agent for the Great Forepaugh Show, coming Wednesday, July 30. The *State Journal* reported a contract made for 600 feet of billboards.

On July 5, the *Journal* noted the arrival of Mr. Coyle and 12 bill posters. The *Capital* mentioned the presence on the 5th of Fred Lawrence, also an agent of Forepaugh's. Additional posting was done on the 16th when advertising car No. 3 arrived. Newspaper advertising began July 17 in the *North Topeka Mail* with a second insertion July 24. Display ads appeared in the *Capital* July 20, 27, 29 and 30. The only advertisement in the *Commonwealth* was July 29, the day before the exhibition.

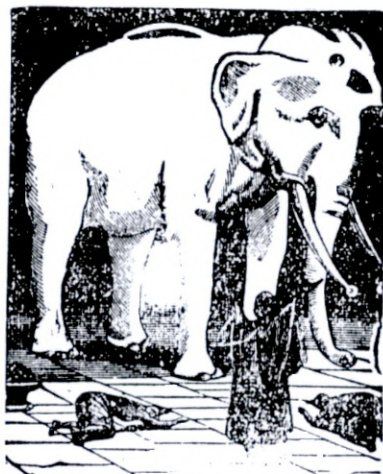
## GREAT Forepaugh Show

Is now making its fourth  
Grand Tour of the Dominion of  
Canada,

And will positively exhibit in all its vast  
entirety, at

### GUELPH, Saturday, September 6th

Afternoon and Evening.



The New World's Latest, Greatest  
Wonder, the Sacred Royal Siamese

## WHITE ELEPHANT

First ever seen in a Christian land. Endorsed  
by the Highest Scientific Authorities in the  
country. Exhibited

WITH THE GREAT  
FOREPAUGH SHOW

Forepaugh's white elephant was illustrated in his 1884 newspaper ads. Pfening Archives.

No display ads were published in the *Journal*, but the news columns included numerous handouts, a total of 19, which must be regarded as paid advertising.

Professor E. Abt presented a slide show--a stereopticon--on the side of the Windsor hotel the night of July 25. The presentation was arranged by another member of Forepaugh's advance, Special Agent C. A. Potter.

Two features of the show were heavily promoted in all advertising--Arabs and Elephants. Cole had 12 Arabs; Doris had "14 Brawny Turks"; but Forepaugh had thirty of the "Sultan's Own Children of the Desert!" "A Tribe of Moslem Mamelukes, Moors and Arabians from the Biblical Plains of Sinai,

the Venerated Shores of the Red Sea and the Adored Shrine of the Prophet."

The act of the Arabs as described in the *Journal* was a sure crowd pleaser.

"The Arab athletes in Forepaugh's circus leap over a bridge of bristling bayonets held at 'shoulder arms'; and vault over sharpened scimeters, turn somersaults, discharging pistols as they turn, and form human pyramids, extending from the ground to the dome of the canvas, and perform other equally blood-chilling acts, which no one but a desert-born Arab would ever attempt."

On show day, according to the *Commonwealth*, "Wes Brown, of the Post office, had a great time yesterday morning hobnobbing with Forepaugh's Arabs. They sipped wine, licked salt and wept on each others' necks." Brown managed the lunch room at the post office.

Set in large type in all the newspaper ads was the phrase "100 PERFORMING ELEPHANTS!" Immediately above, in very small type, was "a quarter of a." Read together, if any one ever saw the small type, the result would be "a quarter of a 100 PERFORMING ELEPHANTS!"

The elephant musicians were described as:

"Elephants Playing the Organ  
"Elephants Beating the Drum  
"Elephants Striking the Cymbal  
"Elephants Playing the Xylophone  
"Elephants Playing the Trombone"

A handout in the *Journal*, July 28, proclaimed, "25 Performing Elephants Coming. Twenty-five trained elephants, all appearing simultaneously, are exhibited in Forepaugh's Show, and, at the word of command, rear their ponderous bodies in colossal pyramids. The twenty-five trained elephants appear in living pyramids, dances, military evolutions, engage in racing, play on instruments, etc., besides which they display all the human attributes of passion."

In addition there was a small clown elephant and the monster Bolivar. Barnum had Jumbo, the largest elephant ever exhibited on the North American continent, but Forepaugh stretched the statistics of Bolivar in an attempt to gain first place. "Bolivar, the largest and heaviest elephant ever placed on exhibition," according to the *Journal*. "He stands twelve feet high and weighs four and a half tons, and is thought to be over a hundred years old. Forepaugh has twenty-five other elephants, but none of them excite so much attention as Bolivar along side of whom the rest appear as midgets." Bolivar was probably America's second largest elephant.

On arrival, the elephants were watered at a horse trough near the Union Pacific depot and one stepped in the water and knocked the bottom out of the trough.

A story on show day published in the *Journal*, reported the presence of 29 elephants. Other bits of press agent information

were: "Mr. Forepaugh carries 325 head of horses, ponies and mules.

"The big tent, where the 'circus proper' is given, seats 10,000 people. [Some ads claimed a capacity of 20,000 seats; other ads claimed 15,000.]

"The highest salaried performers are the Silbon family, trapeze artists who draw \$450 every week.

"The weight of the snakes that the Hindoo girl wraps around her body at one time is 225 pounds.

"Sixty cars of extra length, all being between forty and sixty feet long, are required to transport the show."

The train arrived in three sections on the Union Pacific and the railroaders called it "the best string of cars ever brought west with a circus. All substantially built and in good order."

The Great Forepaugh Shows unloaded at the Union Pacific depot in North Topeka and moved across the Kansas river to the new circus grounds between Fourth and Fifth streets, just west of the Santa Fe depot. For an unexplained reason the parade was nearly two hours late, but at least 6,000 people remained on Kansas avenue to see it. Due to low hanging telegraph and telephone wires, the parade route was abbreviated. The avalanche of gilded splendor moved west on Fourth Street, turning south at Quincy; at Eighth Street, west to Kansas avenue; then north to Fifth street and back to the lot.

The *Commonwealth* reported that 74 of Forepaugh's people registered at the Windsor, Allen Sells' hotel, but the 53 year old Forepaugh signed in at the Fifth Avenue.

The *Capital*, July 31, reviewing the show reported that, "The parade in the forenoon was witnessed by thousands as it passed along the principal streets of the city, and it was indeed imposing, being decidedly the best parade of the kind ever given in the city. One particularly noticeable feature of the parade was the immense number of elephants, twenty-five being in line.

"In the afternoon and evening fully 10,000 people visited the show. The menagerie is larger than ever and contains many new and rare animals among which is the sacred white elephant, 'Light of Asia,' about which so much has been written. While the animal is not white as many suppose, it is of an ashen gray hue and has much softer and smoother skin than the common Asiatic elephant. Through the courtesy of Mr. C. A. Davis, one of Forepaugh's gentlemanly press agents, and Mr. Charles Fulford, the keeper of the 'Light of Asia' a *Capital* reporter with other members of the press were permitted to make a close inspection of the animal, and found no evidence of fraud as has been charged. The skin of the animal is clear and healthy. It differs from other elephants in the shape of its head and ears, the ashen color and smoothness of its skin, the square shape

of the proboscis and the presence of a third nostril on the under side of the trunk.

"The circus performances were many with some of them new and startling. As a contortionist Morris Joyce cannot be excelled, while the feats of juggling by Nelton the Egyptian boy juggler were indeed wonderful. George Jagendorfer the Austrian Hercules exhibited a degree of strength that was amazing, easily handling and tossing about

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**Admission, 50 Cents. Reserved Chairs, \$1.**

Doors Open at 1 and 7 p. m. Performances begin an hour later.

Newspaper advertisement used by Sells Bros. during the 1884 season. Pfening Archives.

weights that ordinary men could not lift. The acrobatic performances, the trapeze and horizontal bar acting, and the riding were all unusually good, and the clowns actually sprung some new jokes. The afternoon performance closed with races of various kinds including a series of dashing hippodrome races."

Even before Forepaugh arrived in Topeka, the town was being prepared for the next attraction. Directly above a Forepaugh handout in the *Commonwealth*, July 27, appeared the following paragraph: "M. J. O'Neil, press representative for Sells Brothers Monster 50-Cage Menagerie and Great 4-Ring Circus, ar-

rived yesterday with a car load of paper, an excellent corps of paste slingers and will proceed at once to transform Shawnee and adjoining counties into a regular picture gallery. The show is booked to appear here September 11th."

W. W. Cole, April 29; John B. Doris, May 9; Forepaugh, July 30; and still to come, Sells Brothers, September 11, and on October 2, Barnum and London. The season of 1884 may have been the greatest in the history of Topeka.

*Research funded by grants from: Wolfe's Camera Shops, Inc., Topeka, Kansas and First National Bank of Kansas, Topeka.*

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